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(*DAVIDÉE BIROT*)

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THE REDEEMER

CHAPTER I

ARDÉSIE

MAIEUL JACQUET, known to all his comrades as "Sobersides," because his laugh was so rarely heard, left his work long before the usual hour and entering the shelter, took off his sabots and hung up his gaiters carefully on a beam which ran across the hut. For one moment his bare head appeared through the triangle formed by the half-closed shutters. He looked across the horizon to the south west as though dreaming of someone in that direction.

"Are you off?" enquired a man who was working a few yards from the hut. "Are you sick of stone-breaking? So am I, I have found nothing but rubbish for the last few months."

"Perhaps," replied Sobersides.

"Well, you may have private reasons for leaving work before four o'clock?"

There was no answer. Maieul re-entered the hut and began leisurely to pack up the remains of his dinner, tying it up with the

bowl and spoon in the check handkerchief spread on the floor.

"What's the use of asking him questions?" said another worker, "if that chap has any secrets, you won't dig them out of him, not even when he is drunk—but then he never gets drunk."

"He's in luck."

"You're right."

The voices ceased and from all sides there came the cracking of breaking slate, the sonorous music of pick-axes, the heavy thud of mallets, and the measured sound of scissors shaping the slate tiles. If a regiment of three hundred men were to amuse themselves by smashing glass with hammers they might produce a similar symphony. Jolting carts, guided by children, passed with their load of stones along the roads thick with blue clay and having deposited their burden, under the whip of the urchins, the horses now standing in the carts, broke into a trot, while the sound of heavy wheels on the roadway was mingled with the lighter music of splintering slate.

Sobersides' shelter was new and roomy; he had built it himself with planks of wood, filling in the cracks with broom, heather, and sprigs of alder, joy of the deer in spring. To the right of the entrance, piles of finished slates of every kind and shape were stacked, ready to be taken away.

The morning had been stormy, a real March morning, and the afternoon damp. The tiniest splinter of slate on the roadway had caught a drop of water which had not dried. Grey clouds travelled incessantly from the

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west, shutting out every trace of blue. For one moment the grey curtain lifted and a stretch of faint green sky appeared on the western horizon; in the distance roofs of scattered houses stood out in the pale light, a few factory chimneys could be distinguished among the sloping hills and tree tops, and like a wingless windmill the well of Fresnais towered in the background.

Maieul Jacquet came out of his hut, pushing a bicycle, his bundle slung across his back.

"Good-night all," he cried.

"Good-night."

Sobersides was no ordinary person. From the age of eighteen he had borne the responsibilities of a man. He was a splendid workman, a man who could get through four loads to one, that is to say that each time the cart passed, a new provision of slate blocks was left at his door. But it was chiefly his character and love of solitude which distinguished him from his fellows. When, a tall dreamy stripling, he came to Savennières from the islands of the Loire, his face and manners had found favour with those with whom he came into contact. If he spoke little he was yet a musician and poet but not a singer of wedded bliss. Sometimes the workmen in the shelters could be heard singing, it was said, Maieul's compositions. And at rare intervals from the hills of Gravelle the soft notes of a flute sounded on the night air, bringing tears to the eye. The neighbours then would look at one another and murmur:

"Maieul is in one of his moods."

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Maieul pushed his machine a few yards along the stony road and then mounting it rode leisurely towards Ardésie, the little parish where he lived. Every morning, every night he passed along the same road, turning aside from the village to reach La Gravelle. If he were unlike anyone else, the same could be said of his house. It stood alone, isolated, among hills, amid disused roads, deserted for more than a hundred years. To the astonishment of all he had taken up his quarters in the old house, far away from the village inn and from neighbours, neighbours who were always ready to chat, or crack a joke, or at least to lend a newspaper.

Maieul did not hurry but at the same time he appeared to scale the steepest hill without effort. In a few minutes he reached the little market place of Ardésie which could not boast one old-fashioned long-roofed house, a mullion window, or even a tower. Instead there was a brand new grocer's, a tobacconist, two freshly-painted, newly-thatched huts, and a vast storehouse, deserted by the Slate-quarry Commission, whose sloping roof gaped wide in parts, making way for sun, rain, and stars.

The market place was deserted when Maieul crossed it but as he turned into one of the streets of the scattered village a group of little girls dashed wildly out of the schoolhouse, singing, shouting and waving their hands. Two of them, unable to check themselves, ran into the cyclist who staggered but managed to save himself, and dismounted with a shrug of the shoulders. Twenty little girls shouted with delight, no one was hurt, and the big young workman had been obliged to stop.

"M. Maieul has fallen down, fallen down, fallen down."

"Ernestine, you will be kept in to-morrow."

The noise instantly ceased as the clear tones rang out.

The small girls fell into two groups which disappeared in different directions.

"M. Maieul, I am very sorry."

"I am not, no harm's been done."

He shrugged his shoulders again and looked silently at the school children disappearing in the distance.

The teacher who had been superintending her pupils as they left, stood on the threshold of the door, on either side of which rose two posts about the height of a man, that is to say, just a little higher than Mademoiselle Davidée Birot's head. She was young, she stood erect, while her eyes, tired with reading and writing, wandered with relief from the clear streak of sky on the horizon, over the mournful landscape, to the tall young man standing in the road. Between her black dress and the door-posts there was a view of wet earth and sand, the courtyard of the school, and beyond—leafless pear trees and the arch of an arbour.

After watching the children for a moment Maieul seized the handles of his bicycle and with a quick movement of the body jerked back his bundle which had been displaced. He was about to ride off when it occurred to him that it would be rude to leave without a few words of conversation with the teacher and he turned towards her. A look of deep astonishment suddenly came into his face, and he moved one hand from his bicycle.

"What is that near you, Mademoiselle," he enquired, "is it a shovel?"

"Why, yes, Monsieur Maieul, it is."

"But it is as big as my own!"

"I found it here, we have no other."

"But you are surely not going to use it?"

"Oh, yes, I am, and this very instant."

She did not laugh the unrestrained wide-mouthed laughter of the women of the people. Her laughter was meditative and restrained, reflecting her mind on her lips. There was no mocking in it, she showed a glimpse of white teeth. She knew Maieul.

"The good fellow looks on me as a Princess in disguise," she thought.

"Do you suppose we have a gardener, M. Maieul? The Corporation does not supply us with one, the Mayor of Ardésie would be rather surprised if I were to ask for one. We do our own digging, sow our own carrots, onions, parsley, radishes. It is not the work of a professional gardener, but spring is upon us; if we wish to vary our menu, we must set to work. I'll start now."

Her peculiar laugh, which seemed partly to disguise her thoughts, attracted and at the same time embarrassed the young workman. Mademoiselle Davidée had turned away, she was already half-way across the courtyard; he watched her push open the gate close to the school kitchen and lead the way to the kitchen garden. She stepped over a bed already sown with lettuce and took up her position on the adjoining bed. Would she really, with those little white tapering hands accustomed to hold a pen, be able to lift that heavy shovel and dig

deep in the earth? Undoubtedly. Her foot was on the shovel, her left hand raised, she was bending forward,*when Maieul seized the handle of the shovel, and took it from her.

"Give me that tool," he cried. "It will be more at home with me. I'll dig your garden."

"Oh!"

"Quicker than you could."

"Really?"

"And it will please. . . . Anyway, it won't take long."

She was standing in the lettuce bed, not knowing whether to be amused, or to be touched. But Maieul threw off his coat, hung it on a pear tree and set to work, throwing up the rich wet earth.

"Well, since you really mean it, I am deeply obliged to you. As it happens I have some exercises to correct Thank you."

He made no reply, it was characteristic of the man to waste no energy in words. Already with a few strokes of the shovel he had dug up one of the narrow beds, and was setting to work on the second. The teacher moved away up the path, well marked with the print of little heels, traces of herself and of Mademoiselle Renée Desforges, the headmistress. She crossed the recreation ground in sight of the garden, unconsciously walking very erect and without swinging her body. On the threshold she turned back to look at the sky of which the cloud curtain had regained possession, blotting out the clear streak to the west.

"What a dismal light, Mademoiselle, it is most depressing."

"Don't be sentimental, child, and don't be a humbug, I heard you joking a minute ago."

"Yes, with Maieul Jacquet, who insisted on digging our garden. Isn't it amusing?"

"Perhaps."

"Why do you say perhaps?"

"He has some reason for it you can be sure of that."

"Well, it amuses me, and I don't trouble about his reasons. But I can assure you that this greyness and rain and mist have made me quite——"

"What?"

"Desolate? no—sad?—well, inclined to be sad."

"You had better tell the inspector so, he will advise you to get married, or perhaps he will appoint you to some town of the Côte d'Azur . . . There's always a blue sky there."

Mademoiselle Renée Desforges' thin lips curved in a disdainful smile but, suddenly, the bodice she was sewing fell to her knee, she ceased laughing abruptly, and began to speak rapidly and passionately.

"You're still a novice after three and a half years of teaching and a new-comer, though you have been six months in Ardésie. I pity you. You never speak of marriage but you cultivate to perfection the sentimental side of you. A dying woman, a sick child, a strike, a mewing cat, a swallow with a broken wing, make you suffer. You become agitated, you ponder on the problem of evil, you, a poor little assistant schoolmistress, exiled in Ardésie, an object of jealousy to the Curé, unheeded by the residents, watched by the authorities, in fact not in an enviable position. You are on the wrong road. Take my advice, live for yourself, do what you

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can to get promotion, keep your class up to the mark, clean copybooks and so on. The rest is superfluous, you'll get no thanks for it. No zeal for the suppression of evil; cultivate an attractive attitude of universal doubt, that's viewed with favour. Above all, no dreams of conjugal love; if love of another sort doesn't shock your principles, you may dream of it. But what sort of a man is the husband of a village teacher? Three out of four live on our work. And if we choose a colleague, then we renounce all hope of promotion, it would be luck indeed to find two vacant posts in the same town. And besides, child, I don't know many of our male colleagues whom I would consent to marry. No, you must love your profession for itself, wrap your heart in blotting paper to dry it well, always answer yes to the authorities, and reach the age of retiring without being too worn out."

"What a profession of faith, and how ardently you proclaim it. I assure you there is no excuse for your lecture on possible or impossible marriages. I swear to you that there is no suitor on the horizon. I have just searched it, the horizon is one expanse of unbroken mist, with not a single ray of light."

She laughed gently, bending her head a little.

"But perhaps you're right," snapped Mademoiselle Renée, "to be different from other teachers. Your father is rich, you have a dowry, you are an aristocrat in your own line."

She rose, pricked her needle in the bodice, folded the latter carefully, and put it on the kitchen table.

"Well, I'll make the soup, since it's my turn.

Will you correct your copybooks near me? Perhaps you would correct some of mine?"

"Willingly."

Davidée crossed the little hall from which a flight of stairs led to the bedrooms and entered the square scantily furnished room they called the drawing-room. Having found the copybooks, she returned to the kitchen, and sat down by the table, her eager young face turned towards the window.

"Middle Class," this was Mademoiselle Desforges' class. "Copybook belonging to Madeleine Bunat. Friday, March 26th. Writing: Imitate good example." Davidée quickly wrote the mark *passable*. "Problem—French composition. Relate how you intend to spend your Easter holidays in a useful manner, whilst resting from your studies."

"It isn't bad, Madeleine's essay—are you listening, Mademoiselle Renée?"

"Yes, I'm listening."

The headmistress, leaning over the stove, hung the saucepan on the hook; she threw a few handfuls of dried thornbush on the dead embers, took a newspaper, folded it tightly to prevent it burning too quickly, lit it, and put the flame to the sticks; they burnt up throwing out a white light. Instantly she stamped on the paper, and put it away carefully for the next day. An avowal of poverty, all the women of Ardésie would have done the same. Davidée watched her.

"Well, read your masterpiece," said Renée.

"Oh, yes, here goes, 'I intend to spend my holidays usefully, as I am now too old to be always playing. In the morning I will help with

the housework, run errands and prepare the vegetables. In the afternoon I will do some kind of manual work, such as sewing, embroidery. But I will also have some hours of leisure, which, when alone, I will employ in reading or drawing. I will often invite my little friends to come and play with me. In this way my holiday will be spent usefully and agreeably."

"I agree with you, it's quite good," said Renée straightening herself, her face reddened, her blue eyes sparkling with the reflection of the flames, "I have always had faith in Madeleine Bunat "

As often happened Davidée shook her head, and contradicted her first statement. She spoke impulsively, and better judgment frequently qualified hastily delivered opinions.

"After all, isn't it a very poor ideal, Madeleine Bunat's vision of a holiday ? "

"How would you improve on it ? "

"I don't know ; as I was reading it aloud I was thinking, ' Formula, formula learnt by heart,' it does not carry conviction, I suppose."

"Well, I suppose, arguer, that you are paying no attention to your gardener. Is he still there ? "

Davidée, the light-footed, the agile, sprang up and ran past Renée to the window in the far corner of the room.

"Yes, he is ; he is frightfully hot ; the garden is nearly finished You should see him. If we were paying him a high fee he could not work with greater energy. Heigh ho, what a shovelful, my poor Maieul Sobersides ! He looks taller in the gloom, he looks like a giant roaming among the pear trees."

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The young girl returned to her exercise books, and bent over them.

"That man has done a kindly act."

"I should find it so, if it were done for me."

"I assure you—poor fellow."

The two teachers, one with raised head, the other with head bent, looked at each other in the fading light with questioning eyes. Each one was silently asking herself. "What are you secretly thinking?" Both were young, though there were some years between them, and their youth lent singular depth to the emotion which the unspoken word love had awakened. Long years of dry study hung over them, ready to cry out: "What is our reward? Is there to be a truce?"

Such efforts, such solitude The monotony of the unchanging task, the superficial affection of some children, the ingratitude of the rest. The present hour was pregnant with complaint and hungered for sympathy, but yet was resigned to silence, and vague thoughts troubled the souls of the women. "See this kitchen, this courtyard, the simmering saucepan, all these signs of humble life, which we have just enough courage to live through. But if it were for him, the unknown stranger?" The same dream was reflected in the eyes of both Davidée and Renée. But the latter no longer believed in thoughts which haunt the silence with sweet music and tempting visions. She was disillusioned, she was beginning to get old. Her beautiful fair hair had lost some of its golden brilliance. Her cheeks had begun to show obstinate red patches. The younger one had not completed her fourth year of teaching. They looked at one another. Mademoiselle Renée's

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semi-ironical smile did not change. Her assistant, who in a flash had seen the vision of a happy future and felt the quick passing of springtime, was the first to sadden; she was conscious of a feeling of gratitude for the sympathy she believed Renée was tendering. Then she bent once more over her books. They had not exchanged a word.

Mademoiselle Renée took from the sideboard a tin plate on which was some meat in congealed sauce and put it close to the fire.

“Elementary Class: Writing: Temperance preserves health . . . Little Philomène Letourneur is incredibly lazy. You should see her page of writing. I shall give her a bad mark.”

“Her father will beat her.”

“No, he drinks, nothing troubles him. The mother is a really good woman.”

Davidée took up her pen, scratched out the word bad, and wrote in the margin “Lacking in application.”

“Elementary Class. Temperance preserves health— This is little Anna Le Floch.”

“The Bretonne? We have got too many of them. They come to us in regiments from Poul-laouen, Huelgoat, and Redon.”

“It is not well written, it’s all over the place: Temperance—preserves—health; but she has no health to speak of, although there is no doubt respecting her temperance. I am afraid she will die. It would be the first death among my pupils. I will put *passable*, there will be fewer tears.”

She continued opening and shutting copy-books, bending lower and lower in the failing light. Her serious, mobile, red-lipped mouth murmured the names of the pupils.

"Julie Sauvage, Lucienne Gorget, C  rentine Le Derf, Jeannie Fete-Dieu——"

Sometimes she uttered a remark aloud, to which Ren  e replied from whatever corner of the kitchen she happened to be in. When she had finished, she piled up the copybooks on the table, and went over to the door which gave on to the courtyard. She opened it carefully, stepped out, listened, and came back almost immediately.

"He is gone," she said.

"Without saying good-bye? Rustic manners."

"But the garden is finished. After all——" she broke off without finishing her phrase.

"I must light the lamp, it is quite dark," she said instead.

She took the lamp from the sideboard, a glass lamp with an ugly shade, on which was displayed a pack of cards on a green background. David  e lit the lamp, saw that the chimney was well placed, for she was a very careful little woman, and began to lay the table. The school-mistresses eat morning and night off a tablecloth, of coarse linen, it is true, but still a cloth, something white and pleasing to the eye, and savouring of town habits.

David  e spread the cloth on the table, and carefully smoothed out the pleats which she would as carefully re-make in half-an-hour. Ren  e, bending over the stove, lifted the saucepan and poured the contents into the soup-tureen half full of bread. She replaced the saucepan on the stove, still bending.

"It's a pity Maieul Jacquet leads such a bad life. He certainly is not a bad man."

"What do you call a bad life?"

"How simple we are."

"Of what do you accuse him?"

Davidée, leaning forward over the table, her hands spread out on the cloth, was annoyed to feel the hot blood spring absurdly to her cheeks, her forehead, her lips.

"Don't you really know? But I knew all about it six weeks after coming to Ardésie. Maieul Jacquet, commonly known as Sobersides, is Phrosine's lover."

"The woman who sweeps our class-rooms?"

"The same."

"Whom I shall see here to-morrow?"

"Yes, and the following days, the mother of Anna Le Floch."

"Oh, how you make her fall in my esteem. I shall never be able to look at her without thinking of it."

"Oh, you will soon learn to be indulgent."

"I am. I do not openly reproach anyone. I close my eyes to their vices. But all the same I like sometimes to rest them. I knew that woman was unhappy; sometimes she looks a rebel, wild, hard of expression, impenetrable, but always with a certain dignity of bearing."

"Trust to it. Evidently she cannot live on what we pay her."

"I should never have believed it . . . she always goes about bare-headed, she takes pride in her hair. I imagined she was veiled with the winged veil of virtue."

"Do you consider a head-dress a protection?"

"I thought she had a settled look, a look of a mother who needs her child. I have never spoken to her beyond telling her to do this, that,

or the other ; a 'good-day,' or 'you have forgotten to replace the broom in the cupboard'."

"Have you any remorse on the subject?"

"How many persons have no further connection with our mind than is portrayed in those words: yes, no, I have not the time. Good-bye till to-morrow."

Mademoiselle Renée's sonorous laugh sounded through the peaceful room, enveloped as it was in the silence of the court, the garden, and roadway, silence intensified by the mist rising in clouds over the boundless country. "

"Eat, my dear, you need refreshment. You can philosophize to-morrow. Are there many philosophers of your stamp in the Charentes district? I confess I cannot follow you and I don't trouble my head as you do. When I have got through my classes respectably, I leave humanity alone. Will you have some more soup?"

"No, I am not hungry."

"There you are. If you had dug the garden yourself you would have had the appetite of a young wolf."

Sitting opposite one another, the two women continued their meal. They slowly resumed the conversation, uninteresting but necessary, which they held every evening relating to the work of the next day, and the lessons to be given. Davidée Birot, though she valiantly tried to appear attentive, was obviously thinking of other things; there was an under-current of profound emotion in her wandering attention and her semi-listless glance. She too at this moment was not yielding either her mind or her heart to her neighbour. "Yes, no, certainly," was all she said.

Her face was expressionless. Like so many others it merely showed that life was still there, the blood still circulating. Though her features were irregular, it was a face which awakened interest, because of its pallor, contrasting with the black eyes and the blood red lips.

Fat, blonde Mademoiselle Renée would have welcomed more liveliness in her companion. Had she ever felt the same uneasiness as Davidée? If so, she must have conquered it with ease. The spinster of thirty-two lived almost sheltered from the shudder which emanates from the high tide of feeling. She was no lover of melancholy; she fought against attacks of it, becoming ever rarer and lighter, by seeking to distract her mind; she would not think, she refused to foreshadow the end, to trouble herself with questions which she had once for all decided not to fathom. Her gaiety was prompt, it was not born of courage but was, on the contrary, a flight from sorrow, from moral uneasiness, from the thought of death, but it was deceptive.

"She is always good-humoured," said the parents of the children when they came to chat with the schoolmistress. They left unmoved, uncomforted, with nothing but the souvenir of clear colourless phrases, mingled with little familiarities and studied jokes. There were only two or three occasions on which Mademoiselle Renée had shown any violence of temper and unrepenting severity. The Curé of Ardésie was one of the inhabitants whom she hated, though she scarcely knew him. The two other enemies

were young women : one had complained that the schoolmistress had in class torn a catechism belonging to one of the pupils ; the other had dared to say "that that blonde would soon have a blotchy complexion."

To amuse her assistant, Renée began to give a description of the last meeting of teachers which she had attended. She described the toilettes, spoke of the appointments, approving only of those she could not envy, and finished by saying :

"Come, child, let's go for a walk ; it is not very fine, but it makes a change, and warms the blood. You need some distraction. Ah, how young you are."

The two women quickly washed up the things at the sink near the fireplace. They displayed a certain nervousness in doing so, especially the head mistress, who aspired to some better paid post, when she would be able to afford a little servant. She had washed more dishes too, in her time, than her assistant.

They were soon out of doors.

"How mild it is," remarked Renée.

"Wind from the south-west, rain for to-morrow," said her companion.

They had put on sabots with straps over their shoes. The greasy mud slipped from under their feet. There were houses on one side of the road only. Beyond the school was a square building comparatively new, roughcast with white, after which the houses were low-lying and of older date. Their long roofs covered with moss and dust stretched to the cross-roads and beyond ; in the faint

light they seemed woven with coarse brown wool, patched with old vests and trousers, such as the peasants wore in former times. The two women turned into the road, which had buildings only on the south side and east. The café was lit, and through the glass door its lights were reflected on the road. To the east lay a ruined wall and a house before which there stood a tree, the only tree to throw its shade over this village of working people. To the north a deserted house, the outer staircase serving in summer as a sleeping apartment for tramps and dogs. Work was over, the soil no longer groaned under the waggons laden with slate, and two women stood alone listening to the night wind. Every living thing had taken refuge in the two streets which branched off, one to the south, the other to the south-east, streets lined with storehouses, newly built houses and workmen's dwellings, with taverns where, though it was past the hour for admitting customers, several men still lingered to drink. The teachers close to each other kept to the road. They passed houses where some of their pupils lived, and glanced at the windows, they were able to recognize.

"I must go and see Jeannie Fete-Dieu's grandmother," said Davidée.

"Is she worse?"

"The little girl told me so."

"Well, it is good of you. I envy you. I cannot see anyone suffering, it's more than I can bear."

The assistant teacher was tempted to say :

"In that case don't look at me."

But she kept silent, chiefly because she did not know why the fit of sadness, which she could not shake off, had fallen on her. Or if she knew, she could not as yet express her knowledge in words.

"We are personages of some importance," she said presently, "I find comfort in repeating it to myself."

"Great personages, no doubt, shawls on our heads, sabots on our feet, solitude around us. My dear Davidée, when you have been six months in this place, you will begin to realise that we have been offered in sacrifice, that we have been, one may almost say, condemned "

A discreet musical laugh broke the stillness of the night, like the song of awakening birds.

The streets all round were deserted, but the sounds of human life were borne on the wind from the town, and travelled over the country. Confused murmurs with at intervals a distinct note rising to the surface of the sea of sound ; a human voice , the whistle of an engine ; a few bars of a waltz from the military band in the distant town. A clock struck the hour, and then once more the confused murmur of mingled sounds, the song of life, with its burden of sorrow, work and joy. Electric lamps in a distant yard stood out like islands of light in the surrounding darkness. A moist heat was creeping up with the mist ; stones, walls and trees were dripping with moisture. At intervals there was a breath of spring in the air, though scentless and fugitive.

"You are right," said Davidée, "the night is balmy."

"A poet would say voluptuous," replied her

companion, as she put her arm round the assistant teacher.

The two women turned into a little path running through fields leading past a deserted house. They walked slowly, moved and silent. Their way lay through the little village where the church stands, and back to the schoolhouse. Halfway across the field they stopped, startled by the rustling of some creature of the night in the grass or trees near by. Their fear past, neither laughed, but Renée, drawing her companion to her, kissed her.

"I like you very much, dear," she murmured, "and you?"

Davidée was surprised, but with quick gratitude answered,

"I also like you, Mademoiselle."

They walked on again, past the church, whose tower rose dimly against the sky, and made their way back to the schoolhouse where they lived and taught their pupils how to live.

They were certainly a force in the neighbourhood, if not important personages as the assistant teacher had said. A young force, one in the full fervour of her enthusiasm determined to spend her strength for her pupils, the other disillusioned, recovered from an enthusiasm, never very lively, with a less high ambition than formerly, but a deep respect for the letter of the regulations. They had both worked hard, they knew more than all the residents of Ardésie put together, with the exception of the Curé and a few engineers. The little boys went to a school in a neighbouring town, and Ardésie could only boast of the school kept by Renée Desforges, assisted by Mademoiselle Birot.

Like their colleagues, the two teachers had left home to teach, they lived among the poor, without friends, absorbed by their professional duties, far from a town, in a strange and severe country district. They could not save on their slender earnings; according to their present circumstances they could not marry, and their very education raised them above the world they lived in, to which, in some degree, they still belonged in spite of their culture.

It was past nine when they reached the school. They lit two candles waiting for them on the kitchen table in identical white and blue candlesticks. On the top landing they separated to go to their respective bedrooms, turning to smile at one another, their faces illuminated by the light thrown out by the candles

“Good-night, Mademoiselle.”

“Good-night.”

“Is this the beginning of a friendship,” thought Davidée, “is the headmistress going to be for me something more than headmistresses usually are, a neighbour, a watchful authority, a life indifferent to ours, an expert whom it is useful to consult, and difficult to love?” Her thoughts did not rest for long on Mademoiselle Desforges. Lifting the little white muslin curtains of her window, she looked out into the night, trying to distinguish a light in a window away to the north. In this same house of past centuries, vast and almost noble, perched on a hill which dominated the whole country, lived Maieul. She could see nothing but the little flickering lights of the village of Morellerie.

“That Maieul, how I hate him now,” she thought. She effaced with her fingers the mist

her breath had made on the glass. "Oh, these men who live years with a woman and then desert her; the type is common enough and hateful. I suppose Phrosine could not induce him to marry her, she is older than he is. How old is she? Thirty-five perhaps, perhaps not; in any case she looks young. And he, how old is he—twenty-six, twenty-seven? What a home-life for poor Anna Le Floch! I am not surprised that she is so often sad and wild. And I who have so often scolded her! She is not my ~~pupil~~, I wish she were, I should like to mother her since she has an unworthy mother. I shall have some trouble in being civil to Phrosine tomorrow. If I were to speak my mind it would never do. We are watched. We may pity but never reproach! Why did he propose to dig my garden? He seemed pleased to render us a service. Who knows, he is a man of few words. I should like to see him well married—married into some one of the many respectable families round about. In a well-kept house, with two children on his knees, or three, or four. Would it be possible to nurse four at a time?"

She smiled at the picture; the maternal instinct was strong in her. She suddenly remembered her work of the morrow, and began to undress rapidly, and jumped into the little iron bed with its yellow curtain. The draught from the window caught the flame of the candle and blew the two little false curls she had placed by the candlestick across the table. She blew out the candle and fell asleep.

Night had brought rest, but not to all. Sorrow, pleasure, misery, duty, claimed watchers. Oh, unequal nights! In the tavern away in the

town, two girls were making a young workman spend in drink his newly paid wages. Little Jeannie sat by her grandmother's bed watching the pale face of the sleeper, and as she watched she joined her hands. Her feet were bare to make less noise. She was alone, the room was lit by one candle, whose flame flickered in the draught. In a house not far distant the hideous midwife Sansrefus stood by the bedside of a girl who had given birth to a prematurely born child.

"No more children are born among my parishioners," said the midwife with a meaning laugh as she tucked in the bedclothes of her client. Under the light of the electric lights carts carried away the refuse. A few poachers and vagrants passed along the deserted roads and quarries.

CHAPTER II

THE BIROT FAMILY

DAVIDÉE BIROT came from a village situated on the sea-coast in the Charentes district, where the coast stretches indefinitely under the shallow waves. Though born in sight of the boundless ocean her family were not sea-faring folk. Her father had not always lived on his income as now. A travelling stonecutter, clever in his trade, persevering in business, Constant Birot had made the tour of France, he had cut, chiselled, and sculptured every kind of stone, granite and marble.

He returned to his own home having saved a few hundred francs, and entered into partnership with a young man of good family named Hubert. The two men bought a stone quarry outside the village in the treeless plain which surrounds green-shuttered Blandes. Hubert provided the funds, Birot the knowledge, and the business slowly developed.

Birot's lack of information sometimes put him at a disadvantage in his business. He resented this more and more as his ambition increased. By a delusion—founded a good deal on vanity, he began to attach an exaggerated importance to the book-learning he had not had an opportunity of acquiring, and to consider that this

lack of information was the only obstacle in his path. When two children were born to him by his marriage with a humble heiress of the district, he declared that the son should be an engineer, and that his daughter too, "should have a good career." The son turned out badly. An unsatisfactory pupil several times threatened with expulsion from the school, he ended by obtaining a Government clerkship in the south. Blandes knew him no more. Madame Birot's friends whispered that he only kept his humble post through his father's political influence. ~~The~~ The latter was already rich, and still working. He had bought out his partner, and had become a personage of importance not only in Blandes, but in the environs and even beyond La Rochelle. At Blandes his reign was supreme, he was the mayor, always sure of re-election, authoritative among the number of those mayors whose power is absolute. He had the gifts necessary for a violent conquest of municipal leadership in times of trouble and jealousy. His intellect was clear, his memory as unfailing as his hatred, and his services promised to all he did not hate. He was a good fellow, jovial with all at first. If a person were pliable he remained so, hand outstretched for a friendly grip. Apparently garrulous, yet under a free and unreserved manner, lurked a suspicious vigilance. The first fault or error committed against his authority or interests, was met with a prompt and singularly brutal retaliation: words, gestures, threats, stories collected for thirty years in his memory, even insinuations if necessary, but insinuations for which one felt there were proofs to hand, overwhelmed the culprit. Birot ran

to the prefect. He made no secret accusation. He shrieked his anger aloud. He clamoured for vengeance. He returned with a promise; the promise was kept · the teacher lost his berth; the official receiver was discharged in disgrace; the municipal councillor found that Auguste the reservist's petition for extended leave was refused; Mother Michelin's soldier son received no leave at harvest time. Sex, youth, repentance, they had no weight with Birot, they neither influenced his decisions already taken, nor those to be taken.

He had never been known to forgive. No debtor had ever obtained a delay from this red-faced lender who laughed as he said · "Pay up, and then we'll see," but he laughed from the knowledge of the strength, the unmistakable legal strength of his case. No one accused him of cowardice. He would go straight to the resident accused of speaking ill of him · "Is it true that you have been disparaging me? Is it a lie? Are you my enemy or my friend? Now's the time to declare yourself."

He was accused of being pitiless. It was the truth. "That man has no heart," was frequently said. That was false.

He still loved his trade, his quarry at Blandes. He loved to see a fine piece of building stone, a beautiful block of rough stone. Though he was beginning to walk with difficulty on his bow legs to which his stomach formed a kind of dome, he would have journeyed miles over fields to see a well-built new house, or the arch of a bridge which did honour to the workmen or the mine.

But above all he loved his daughter. Davidée

was born during the period he called "his hard times," when he worked with his hands with exemplary energy, conscientiousness and regularity. When he came home at night she ran to meet him, dainty and charming with outstretched hands, fine hands which were a marvel to him, tilted chin, and eyes full of childish admiration, and remembrance of yesterday's games, humid and shining with a tenderness of which she already knew the power.

He saw himself in her not as he was, but as he might have been.

"You are intelligent, my little Davidée," he used to say to her, "I'm no fool, but I lack education. You shall have plenty of it; I will buy you books, even fat expensive books, anything you fancy. I'll pay for mistresses of writing, reading, arithmetic, everything that can be learnt. I'll spend my last penny that you may be a credit to me; I don't count on your brother. Come and kiss me."

He lifted her in his brawny arms like a feather. He would put her in the high chair bought expressly for her, and which was still used, in spite of her mother, for the growing child now tall as an ear of wheat. It was her father's wish. She was her father's joy, a joy he was afraid to lose, and seeing the child in a baby's chair, made him feel that things would never change. Birot would push the chair to the fire, which his wife had let go down, throw an armful of burning faggots on the burning ash and say: "Warm yourself and show your pretty teeth. Here's the fire which I have earned for you with my arms. Here's the wood of my vines, of which I have sold the wine. Come close—I

have had an annoying day, wife. A block of freestone cracked by the frost, and a beast of a workman who had hurt his knee wanted me to pay damages. You know him, Blaisoir, the bandy-legged man with the shaggy eyebrows. Haven't I been a workman? Haven't I bruised my carcase? Did I give myself airs? I put my hands on his shoulder and shook him till his bones rattled. He was frightened, it served my purpose. Here, little one, stretch out your feet, see how beautifully the sticks burn."

• The child did not laugh as often as he would have wished. She allowed herself to be spoilt with much condescension. Men and women soon learn their power, and the best means of increasing it. Davidée had more fear of her silent mother than of her violent father. When she wanted some special treat, a journey to La Rochelle, permission to fish for mussels in the bay, a tea-party, a fashionably dressed doll from Paris, she asked her father, but her eyes followed her mother, who, her feet shod in everlasting black felt slippers, moved about the room, polishing, dusting, arranging, always tired and never content. Oh, you hearts burning with a love for order in material things and whose whole idea of perfection lies therein.

When her mother had said "Yes" by a movement of the eyelids, or "No" by a brusque motion of the head, Davidée gave no heed to her father's opinion. The cause was lost or won.

Soon the high chair was too high to please Davidée. The child insisted upon touching the ground with her feet like a big girl.

Birot would sometimes call upon her to read

the newspaper. He could only read slowly, and was obliged to spell out the difficult words. By a scruple which would have surprised his friends, the foul-mouthed man would run his eye over the titles of the articles in the Radical paper. "Skip this," he would say, "and that too." He bent forward when his daughter was reading, endeavouring to catch every word which came slowly or rapidly from the reader's mouth, according as the article amused or bored her. She had a delicate enunciation and her alert mind disported itself between the lines like a dolphin in the sea. The sharp little person preferred on the whole to read to herself, her school books and the books which Madame Birot borrowed from the library, or from friends who had two or three dozen stowed away in a cupboard.

At school she did remarkably well. When she was asleep in her room just over the dining-room which did duty as a reception room for Madame Birot and a smoking room for her spouse, husband and wife would open her mark book and gaze with pride at the high figures which invariably stood for "very good." Madame Birot, however, whose imagination was less lively than her husband's, did not end by saying as he did: "She'll make her mark." She would add: "No doubt, well settled near us, she will do us credit. You must keep watch over your ambition, Birot. It has sent our son from home, don't let it send our daughter too."

The man was amazed at such remarks. He called his wife *bourgeoise*. He spoke of science, he repeated words he had heard at the works or at public meetings, and which came back to him

linked together like the links of a chain. He knew the world, he met men, he understood progress, he would sacrifice his interest, even his own pleasure, for the little one's future. But he did not say what he would do.

It became known in time. The headmistress of the school at Blandes had long since laid her plans before Constant Birot. She volunteered to prepare Davidée herself, and to get her accepted at the *école normale*.

"Such an intelligent child, M. Birot, and so popular with her companions. She is clever and distinguished, yes, distinguished. She is cut out to be a successful teacher. She is a little sensitive, but life will correct that fault."

"I believe you," said Birot.

"When she is fourteen and has had a little rest, I will take charge of her. You need not trouble about her, you need only provide her with the things she requires."

It was upon an afternoon in spring, when the church bells in green-shuttered Blandes were ringing a peal to mark the end of vespers, that Birot announced to his wife that he had chosen a profession for his daughter. Husband and wife were alone in the room on the first floor, furnished with a polished walnut bed with a red cretonne counterpane, four chairs and a round table, articles supplied by the stonemason in accordance with the marriage contract exacted by the father of the future Madame Birot. Through an open door of this square, bare, essentially workman's room, one could see another large room with a flooring of pinewood, a brass bedstead, white muslin curtains, a looking-glass with gilt frame draped with gauze,

and little china ornaments on the mantel-board. The parents' room had no grate. It was colder indoors than out. Davidée had gone with some friends to the village of Villefeue, and the larger, finer, warmer room was therefore empty.

Madame Birot, standing on a chafing-pan which made her appear quite tall, was turned to the light, preparing to iron her daughter's blouses for the coming season, one mauve, and two white, suspended on a string running between the door and window. In front of her was a plank wrapped in a white cloth, and balanced on the back of two chairs. M. Birot was sitting in the half-light on the left, not far from the ironing board. He was anxiously watching a decanter of sweetened red wine, which he had placed close to the little stove on which the irons were warming; a universal remedy which on this occasion would certainly cure an obstinate cough which the master-stonecutter had caught at the works. The oppressive smell of charcoal filled the room. Birot, who had been sitting in silence for about an hour biting his moustache, raised his head suddenly with a defiant gesture.

"I have seen Mademoiselle Hélène. She is ready to teach Davidée, to teach her everything. She answers for the child's ability. In three years, no longer, she will be ready to enter the *école normale* in the rue Dauphine, La Rochelle."

The thin housewife with bands of brown hair, trembled. She seized the mauve blouse with her left hand and spread it out on the board with nervous fingers, which quivered

like eyelids when restraining tears. Her husband had time to add .

"And nothing to pay, just a few miserable books."

"It would be as well to enquire first, whether she wishes to become a teacher. It is a poor profession."

"The most beautiful of all."

"How do you know? Running after other people's children, when you might have children of your own."

• "What's to prevent her getting married?"

"With a schoolmaster, perhaps? A man who is sent here, there, and everywhere, like an officer. And yet you have no love for officers. It's all the same. A man who will have nothing but contempt for me, and for you too. You'll see you won't be able to make the schoolmaster hold his tongue. But there! Your pride prevents you from being intelligent."

"You had better say, straightway, that I am unsuccessful."

"Successful in business, in elections, but your success stops there, you and the world are two."

"The world, you, and I, are three then, because you are not better than your husband, *bourgeoise*. You are only a workman's wife, who puts on gloves on Sundays and feast-days, but who is a nobody. Of the two, it is I who have travelled most, and who have heard the most talk. When your friends call on you I am silent if I happen to meet them, and I look like a man incapable of thinking. They call me Daddy Birot, I

know. But with men I can hold my own, I can tell you. I am listened to, they tremble before my anger, they try to find out *my* opinion in order to agree with me, even before I have opened my jaws. Workmen, policemen, officials, even high ones, bow low as I pass, as though begging me to let them keep their berths; the *Cure* never looks at me, probably because he is afraid to discover that I hate him. The Prefect would invite me to dinner if I wanted him to do so, yes I, the stonecutter, and you too, again, if I desired it. I could call on him in my work-clothes, smoking my pipe, and swearing, and the damned coward would only laugh. I have a power which you can't get without brains. You can't understand the delight to command without an officer's stripes, and to be a policeman in a workman's suit. Only, this pleasure brings duties. My children must fall in with my views, serve the cause, do you understand? Davidée married reflects no glory on me, Davidée a schoolmistress does. Besides, I can help her."

Little Madame Birot stopped ironing the mauve blouse and held the steaming iron towards her husband.

"You choose for her—how pretty."

"No. I want her to choose for me."

"Selfish creature!"

"Isn't she my daughter?"

"She is still more mine, her mother. Don't you see that you are taking her from me?"

"In three years."

"It's like a day—three years! The fear

of losing her will always be over us. Birot, don't do it, for your own sake, for mine, for hers. We shall all suffer, each in our own way."

Birot jumped up, his face flaming, his eyes hard; he stretched out his hand towards the hot iron which his wife quickly drew back, and which she began passing frantically over the mauve blouse.

"Bad hearted man, bad hearted man."

The man was in front of her, between the window and the ironing board. She stopped ironing to look him well in the face, the light falling full on her, straight into her brown eyes, which showed not the slightest sign of fear.

"*Bourgeoise*," he said at last, after a minute's silence, in which he realised that for once anger would not win the day against the wounded mother who defied him.

"*Bourgeoise*, you are, in a way, better educated than I am, but you have no taste for education. I would give half my savings to be educated, to be able to talk well, write and read without my head swimming, as I see so many others do. You think in making my child a teacher I merely want to cut a dash before my friends? Well, you are mistaken. I don't want her to be anyone's inferior, I don't want her to feel ashamed in the presence of learned people; I want her to have what I lack. Science, I am jealous of it. I don't tell my friends that, they think me strong because I shout, but it is because they are the worst of cowards that they pretend I am right. I am wrong sometimes, I can't invent reasons. I am furious when I reply to a friend or an enemy who won't give way, and I can only abuse him.

I want ideas, I want learning, which enables one to laugh at people, instead of getting angry. My daughter shall avenge me. She'll think for me. People will say of her: 'How well that girl can talk, how learned she is.' Whereas of me they say: 'It doesn't do to be Birot's enemy, he's a hard hitter, and fears no one.' It's true enough, but it does not bring happiness."

"Who is happy, Birot? Are you? Am I? Are your business companions?"

He stretched out his huge hands and took hold of the half-ironed blouse and held it out to the light. His mouth under the stiff moustache widened.

"Pretty little wench, Davidée Birot," he said.

"Don't talk of her like that."

"When she is twenty, lovers will dance round her as she leaves the school, like flies round honey."

"Don't touch the muslin, Birot, it's too fine and too clean for you. Give it to me."

He obstinately continued to laugh in an effort to soften his wife.

"I tell you to give it to me. I tell you not to touch it."

This time he threw the blouse on to the board. The woman seized it and began examining it to see whether he had left any finger-marks.

"You'll repent it, Birot," she cried furiously, "to have sold your child to other people's children. You'll be sorry enough when you are old, and your child is not with you, and you can no longer see her. You never give in, but old age will bend you. You won't know what to

do. You'll cry then because you drove the pretty little darling away."

The picture she drew powerfully affected him. He turned, coughed to show that he was ill, leant his forehead against the window, and said :

"Here she is."

"Let me see," cried his wife, running to the window.

She pushed him aside, and he offered no protest. He obeyed his wife implicitly except when it was a question of "ideas." Both were tyrannical in their way, the one in indoor, the other in outdoor matters.

"You say you love her, poor darling! You have a way of loving people, don't I know it, which takes no heed of their tastes, or of their will. Look at her, how well she walks between the tinware man's daughters. How rosy and happy and affectionate she is. She is looking our way, she has seen me, she is telling her companions, 'There's mama.' Poor innocent. Make that a teacher with that smile, and a mouth like apple blossom; make her teach A B C and dip pens in ink. She is crossing the road now alone; she is very careful of that carriage coming along; I have often told her to be careful. Do you hear her coming?"

They turned simultaneously, listening to their daughter's light regular step on the wooden staircase. They watched with feelings of emotion the door open, saw a little girl's face in the shadow of the staircase, a hand push the door back against the wall, and Davidée step into the light.

"Well, mama, well, papa!"

Her face was pimpled, her mouth immature,

her two brown plaits had come undone ; her white spotted dress was short and stained, disclosing well-developed calves in black stockings, her boots were covered with mud ; but there was about her a look of youth and health, abrupt grace, a mysterious but well-defined promise of intelligence, a power of happiness or grief, to cause suffering perhaps, or perhaps to bring comfort, but a something which baffled the limited reasoning power of the parents who embraced her, the mother with a lingering caress, the father brusquely. . . .

“ My dear, dear little Davidée.”

She sat on her mother's knee and leant against her shoulder, and Madame Birot's face became young again. It was embellished by a look of perfect happiness. She was on the verge of rocking her like an infant. Birot, though little given to futile sentiment, looked complacently on the picture formed by the two beings who belonged to him, his wife and daughter. His intellect was uncultured, but it dominated all his feelings, and his present emotion was entirely intellectual. He admired his daughter's glance, Davidée happy in being caressed, but her happiness did not interfere with thought, he guessed that there was singular depth in the brown eyes, one half-closed against her mother's bosom, whose gaze wandered from himself to the ceiling, the window, and round the room. He was proud of her and more than ever determined to adhere to the future he had planned for her. Meanwhile her mother rejoiced in feeling her child pressed against her, in defending her body and soul. They were alike—Davidée and her mother.

The former, however, had a nobility of expression which her mother lacked, and a charming well-shaped little ear, of which neither of her parents could boast. Her breath came in short regular fresh gusts from between her red half-open lips, and was to her mother as the breath of spring. They were silent, father, mother and daughter, their thoughts were wholly different one from the other, and they had a vague feeling of being far apart.

The father was the first to speak.

• "Did you enjoy yourself?"

"Yes, well." She often answered so.

"Did you run?"

"Like a deer."

"Did you drink milk?"

"I dipped my nose in it."

"A big cup?"

"I swam in cream."

"Did you meet anyone? Any of my friends?"

"Yes."

"Did they bow to you?"

"Didn't recognise me."

The man frowned angrily.

"Had you been the daughter of some idle noble, or half noble, they would have recognised you sharp enough; but a daughter of one of their own class, a man who works hard, and earns his pile, they pass her by as though she were a cabbage. It's disgusting."

He breathed hard and furiously. Meanwhile, his wife was unbuttoning Davidée's boots, and getting her fingers covered with mud. Then she felt her stockings.

"They're wet, naughty child. How I hate

letting you go so far. Fortunately, there are some dry stockings in the cupboard."

Undoing the tapes which fastened the stockings to the child's stays, Madame Birot peeled them off as though she were skinning a rabbit. Davidée was laughing, her head leaning against the back of the chair on which her mother had placed her, telling her not to put her feet on the ground. Her mother ran to the cupboard, and began fumbling with the lock. Birot seized the opportunity, and edging his chair closer, he grasped the child's hand.

"Tell her, little one, tell her our plan."

"What, papa?"

She knew well what he wanted, but hesitated, hesitated because she had a very tender heart, and suffered for the grief of others. She knew that an ear was listening there at the back of her. The lower drawer was opened noiselessly, and as noiselessly closed.

"Say that you want to be a teacher. You must be frank, now that you are a big girl. Whom did you meet while you were out? Did you not meet a lady who had been speaking to me?"

Davidée was resolute as well as sensitive. She rose, stood erect, and spoke in measured tones, solemnly, as though delivering a sermon.

"I am going to be a teacher. I met the head-mistress. I shall begin to-morrow."

Having spoken, having made the supreme effort, her heart resumed command. She was about to throw herself into her father's arms, when she was seized round the waist and firmly seated on the chair while her mother knelt before her. She took the child's two feet in her hands and pressed them to her bosom.

"Sit quiet," she said, "while I put on your stockings."

But whether the skin was too damp, or her hands trembled, the stockings would not slip on. She knelt there, head low, back bent, a little nervous mother lost between husband and child.

"God have mercy on us," she murmured.

"There is no God," promptly replied Birot.

Neither mother nor child showed resentment at the blasphemy, they were used to it.

Birot pushed back the chair, and walked up and down the room, watching his wife still fumbling with the stockings, her eyes dimmed with tears. Davidée had grown pale. Her youth seemed suddenly to have deserted her, it had fled from her round cheeks, her lips, her forehead, pity shone from the half-closed eyes, pity for her weeping mother, her face had all the gravity of a child bending for the first time over another's grief.

"You look like the headmistress already," said the father.

Davidée tried in vain to smile. The mother wiped her eyes on the edge of her skirt.

"Go and fetch some water for me to wash my hands, Birot," she said.

It was her revenge for being vanquished. She had given way to the man who did not brook interference with his ideas, but she reminded him that in the house she commanded. He did not resent it, but went heavily down stairs, and could be heard opening the door which led into the little garden.

When he returned, breathless, balancing the pail of water on his right arm, he found Davidée

hanging round her mother's neck, caressing her forehead.

"I shall come back, you'll see what nice times we'll have in the holidays. You'll be so proud of your daughter. Don't harrow my feelings, mama. Don't cry, I have a friend who also wants to be a teacher, she is the best pupil in the school, too."

The father put down the pail, spilling some water on the floor.

"Do be careful, Birot."

He pulled his moustache, and said in a voice which showed no trace of anger.

"I am going to the *café* to see my friends. Let her alone, Davidée; before you go I will have built a new house, a fine one, with a drawing-room, and taps on the first floor, and a stone over the threshold with the date. If things go on as they are now, I'll build that house, and all the ladies of Blandes will be jealous of Madame Birot. She'll be happy there, will the mother, amusing herself by embroidering your linen, and doing tapestry work."

Madame Birot turned abruptly.

"Alone? Do you suppose I shall be happy in any house alone?"

"And I? And your son? Don't we count?"

He left the room shrugging his shoulders.

Spring came. Davidée had begun her work, she earned good marks, and did well. Little by little her mother, who had realised the inevitable from the first, accepted her grief as though wedded to it, and did not complain. Birot said: "She is used to it, she is as proud as I am," but he was mistaken. His wife had immense self-control; in other times and in other circumstances she

would have developed her spiritual life, and acquired a habit of meditation. She was silent for the sake of peace, but a rebel as at first. What would have been the use of fighting? Their son was already a source of unhappiness to his parents; he would never keep his father at home. He was no link between them, but rather a subject of reproach. "He is like you." "Possibly, but you have spoilt him." If Davidée also became an occasion of frequent quarrels, Birot might be capable of some rash act. His wife having once given vent to her grief, hid it in the depth of her heart, cherishing it in secret, weeping over it when alone. But before Birot, before her friends, before the world, she wore a polite smile, difficult to distinguish from placid contentment, from self-love flattered by the little one's success. "She is ambitious, just as ambitious as her husband," said the neighbours; "besides, who rules that household? Doesn't she?"

They did not understand the complex master stonecutter, they could not distinguish between the man who implicitly obeyed in domestic matters and the tyrant of iron rule where his "ideas" were at stake.

Even before her daughter Madame Birot disguised her grief; she had but one mania, and that was to talk always of the past, as though her happiness had fled with the years gone by. "I remember one day, Davidée, one day when you were four years old. How pretty you were with your curly hair, and the affectionate way you had of stretching out your arms. I remember one night when you were feverish, and I heard you coughing, I rushed to the cradle, crying out. 'Our darling has the croup.'"

She counted the days from the end of the holidays to the beginning of the next. She had a horror, barely disguised, of books and copy-books, of the blackboard which had been bought and placed in the white room.

Davidée studied with energy. She brought to the daily task a clear intelligence, a love of study, and an envy of learning. Her father was right when he said: "You are a pretty portrait of myself when you are studying. How I should have loved it."

But the child was still more like her mother. Daughter of an anxious, tormented woman, Davidée was a dreamer at an age when other young girls think only of the amusement of the day and the love of the morrow. Calm in appearance, like her mother, her capacity for suffering and dreaming was not bounded by home and village. She read books, she sought the solution of problems, and was quickly conscious that her anxiety would not be appeased by the mistress who had awakened this passion of knowledge and understanding.

The problem of religion did not trouble her. To please her husband Madame Birot had abandoned all real practice of religion. On great festivals such as Easter she was to be seen at church, which was sufficient to save her from being called irreligious. Her husband was definitely and violently hostile to religion, priests, and Christian schools. He considered the Catholic Church a political institution opposed to the State, the deified all-powerful State, of which he believed himself to be a powerful devotee.

At home Davidée never heard a word in

favour of religion, never saw a holy picture or a book upon the faith. Outside, on rare occasions, she heard men and women, when complaining of the tyranny of laws and officials, regret the closing of the convents, especially the school conducted by nuns, where so many respectable mothers of families had been brought up. Having no knowledge of the religious world, she had no sympathy for sufferings of the spiritual order, though she pitied the old nuns when she was told they were dying of starvation. To her Catholicism was a religion that had had its day. She confused the complaints of believers with opposition to existing authority. She heard speak of "those clericals, eternal enemies of the Republic," and she found these discontented people whom Mr Birot's newspapers accused of being enemies to progress, very tiresome.

One religious souvenir, becoming ever more feeble, occasionally loomed in the sky above this little cultured garden, ploughed and fertile ; the shadow of its wings was faint, but the garden felt its presence. Davidée remembered her first communion, which had never been renewed—a communion for which she was ill prepared, but fervent. She had missed many of the Catechism lessons, given many wrong answers, and few of her companions had shown greater ignorance of religious doctrine. Her mother could scarcely be persuaded to hear the lesson ; Davidée had to follow her about repeating her request, and wait till her father had gone out. Nevertheless, there had been one day when her still pure soul and Divine joy had met, and the meeting had filled her with wonder. A movement of the heart, a desire to be always good, and a luminous

peace had come upon her. A minute, perhaps more, perhaps less, she never knew how long, she had felt a reasonable and sweet certitude that she possessed a soul, the power of audacious flight, and had the sense of being an infinitesimal atom lost and glorified in a Great Being.

No one ever spoke to her of that minute, buried beneath so many other minutes. The white dress had been given away, the wreath of roses kept for some years in a drawer had faded and shrivelled, and one day it too disappeared, during a removal, together with the mother-of-pearl rosary and the gold medal, and neither father nor mother could remember having seen them. Of all material witnesses of her first and only communion there remained nothing but a missal bound in fawn morocco.

Davidée was admitted at the *école normale* in July 1902. During her holidays she went to the south to spend a few days with her brother. Meanwhile the master stonemason was building the house of his dreams. He studied the plans, he drew some of them himself, he scarcely left the works, receiving there the envious homage of his friends. They called him M. Birot now. They secretly calculated the expense, and praised aloud the quality of the material, the size of the dining-room, the drawing-room, the design of the two gardens, the smaller one in front, the larger at the back sloping up to the church, shut in with high walls. Birot indicated with a gesture where he would plant peach trees and cherry trees, and even a mimosa, "because Madame Birot doted on mimosa," the real reason, however, being that no one at Blandes possessed a mimosa.

The three years at the *école normale* were three years of success for Davidée and pride for her father. She was now a young girl who by her black hair and red lips might be mistaken for a daughter of the south. She walked well and had a supple figure. She was not tall, being one inch taller than her mother, and two less than her father. When she laughed she showed white even teeth. Her mind, however, was not of the south. She had the appearance of dominating her sensitiveness, but her reason never really mastered it. She was never seen to cry, her face remained calm, her speech clear; something of her father's robust will could be seen in her features. Her friends little versed in the study of souls would say.

"You are lucky to be able to master your impressions. Have you any emotion that is not intellectual?"

They ignored that a smooth green shallow crust of earth can conceal deep springs, and that the slightest movement on the surface penetrates to those unknown trembling waters.

A reproach, an unjust act, troubled Davidée for long weeks. Ideas too haunted her.

"What is the use of the little light they give me," she would ask herself. "How can it illuminate my life? The life of others, of the world? Have I understood all? What are the consequences of this principle? If such a thing, for example, were to happen to me to-morrow, or had happened in the past, how should I, or ought I to have acted, knowing this?"

Her brain sometimes would be fatigued by its journeying through lands where no one had led her, neither her parents nor anyone else, and

where she found no landmarks. Like a poor hunted levret she ran at random, until she fell by the way.

When Mademoiselle Hacquin, professor of psychology, declared in her first lesson that all morals should be entirely independent of any religious idea, she was really grieved. She was mutinous, and at recreation went bravely up to the professor, with that unhesitating nervous bravery which brooks no delay, to lay her doubts before her.

"I was waiting for you," said Mademoiselle Hacquin. "I saw by the way you frowned that I had surprised, perhaps pained you."

The thin teacher, well used to handling scruples, sarcastic in a caressing meandering way, had the art of superficially calming doubts, of leaving within the bounds of the possible, of the uncertain, anything that she dared not openly destroy. What she could she destroyed, trusting that buildings raised by other hands would perish by lack of care. She was nearly always right. The children lost the ill-planted faith they had brought to the school; in return they received Mademoiselle Hacquin's views; poor stuff delivered in a dogmatic and at the same time cautious style, a professional system which at first seemed to be sound reasoning. But in moments of trial the young girls, who remembered Mademoiselle Hacquin's moral lessons, found that her wisdom gave them no support, no light, no strength, no help of any kind in regulating their lives, and no comfort. The greater number were for ever desolate.

Davidée became resigned like the rest, but with greater difficulty, to aluding to God as the

Unknown. She suffered in feeling herself unsustained, unloved in thinking that the heavens held no love, that there was no invisible protection over her, no judge to appeal to, no perfect beauty regulating the interior life, no Redeemer, no resource against distant but certain death.

Like the others, she carefully studied and reduced to formula, the contradictory philosophies of all unbelievers of the present and some of the past—she endeavoured to find therein some peace of mind. She was exhausted but continued the search. Few of her companions felt so much trouble; they speedily learnt to despise religion. Davidée never joined in their mockeries of it.

"Later on," she would say to herself, "I will study it to find out."

What grandmothers, faithful to their rosary, what male ancestors of robust and honest faith still influenced that heart suffering in secret? The sorrow was not, however, of daily occurrence, it did not prevent the young girl from being gay, from being the most eager in play, in racing, in walking, in studying.

Birot was exultant whenever Davidée said to him: "Father, why do you introduce me to your friends as a marvel? I am no such thing, and they have known me from my infancy."

But each time she came home he invited some of his friends, and entertained them in the big new dining-room.

"Mates," he would say, "this is the flower of Blandes, a girl who knows everything. She could give you a list of the kings of Egypt

without a mistake. She knows what is in the bosom of the earth ; in the stars ; in the stomach of a lizard. She can count without the help of her fingers, quicker than I can give a cuff on the ear ; she is my pride, comrades, you see here what I should have been had I had her education. The best work of my life has gone to produce that bit. Is it successful, eh ? ”

“ Well, you have also built a house which hasn’t its counterpart here.”

“ Yes, truly, but I am less proud of my house than of my daughter. Come, Davidée, recite some fable to these gentlemen.”

“ Father, I am nineteen, I am too old.”

“ Well, a piece of poetry, you know the piece which makes me weep, when your voice is clear.”

“ The Lake ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Here, mother, bring us some liqueur.”

And Davidée, standing in the middle of the room, would recite Lamartine’s verses, while her father carefully poured out the liqueur for his rough comrades.

They listened, touched and attentive, as to some romance, not fully understanding, but realising that wearied hearts cry for sympathy. On these occasions Madame Birot, grown greyer, would stand in the doorway, disappearing at the first sound of the bravoes. She disliked the noise, and discreetly sighed for the moment when the men would leave ; they dirtied the house with their heavy boots. And so she left them and wandered through the rooms, the kitchen and even the cellars, confided to her silent care. The mimosa had grown to a tree,

plantains and lime trees, planted with care, had flourished.

In October 1905 Davidée was appointed to a school in Rochefort-sur-Mer. She spent three years there, and left with her certificate of teaching and won great praise. Her health had become weaker. The doctor who was consulted advised a change of climate, the seaside did not suit her. It was a great grief to the old couple, but they loved their daughter. Birot, Mayor of Blandes, had but to express a wish and Davidée was appointed to the school in Ardésie.

She had been there six months and had had her twenty-third birthday on the 2nd of January, preceding the spring when Maieul Jacquet came to dig her garden, and she learnt Phrosine's sin, and Anne le Floch's hidden sorrow.

CHAPTER III

THE HOUSE IN THE PLAINS

ON the morrow, Wednesday, Davidée superintended the entrance of the children at school time. They arrived in little scattered groups, and could not be seen from the crowd, until they were actually at the door.* They came from right and left under shadow of the walls, and the earth being soft with the night's rain, were unheralded by the clatter of sabots. A little girl would suddenly appear in the doorway, take in with a quick glance the court, the companions who were present, the mistress in charge, and her place in the ranks, near her favourite friend.

Some of them seeing Davidée would come running with sparkling eyes and pursed lips to kiss her. Then like little birds with folded wings, turning to right and left, they would glide away and mingle with their companions. Some passed with a half curtsy, others in their excited chatter did not see their mistress ; others, sulky and mutinous, pretended not to see her, made a show of picking up a ball, or laughing at someone in the distance, and as soon as they were no longer under her direct supervision assumed an impertinent and satisfied look. They all unconsciously played the rôle of their sex,

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of their station, of their day, of their passions already born and firmly rooted.

Davidée stood motionless on the wet sand of the court, a white shawl on her head, watching not for a child, but for a woman. Her heart beat wildly as each person came into the court.

"Why has she not come? She is rarely late. The fire won't be lit in time. That woman neglects her work, and is it surprising?"

She tried to compose her features in order to welcome her in a proper fashion, dignified and not offensive. Visions which she tried to blot out flashed across her mind—she was losing her nerve. Some of the children chased each other round and round while waiting for the hour to strike, others leant mournfully against the out-house, weary with inherited fatigue.

"Anna Le Floch. Here's Anna"

Cries of amazement, shouts of joy went up, and there was a stampede to the gate.

Twenty little girls hung round a child who grew paler in the surging group, and who only replied by a grateful, pained and tired smile. Anna Le Floch, with lank, lustreless hair, with wild green eyes, dressed in a grey woollen dress which fell in a piece from her neck like a choir-boy's cassock, whose hands hung limp as the children grasped them one after the other, while she stood in irresponsive silence. She leant back against her mother, the tall Phrosine, who took her by the shoulders and pushed her gently forward.

"See, little one—they are pleased to see you. Don't press round her, she is still weak; go with them, child"

Phrosine was motherly.

"Good morning, Mademoiselle, I am late,

but she wanted to come. You are displeased, bless me, I have no carriage to bring her in."

Davidée having replied merely by a movement of the head, Phrosine immediately adopted a defiant tone. That is why she pushed her little girl towards the mistress, and marched off quickly to the classrooms.

The children were sorry for little Anna, but the majority could only show their sympathy for their companion who had been unable to play all the winter, by reaching up and kissing her little flat white cheeks. Others moved away because Mademoiselle had her arms around her, and was going towards the class, whispering sympathetic words which they could not hear. Anna, whose hard eyes gazed straight ahead, made no reply. Smoke was issuing from the funnel which filtered out of the classroom windows. When Phrosine came back at twenty to nine the children were formed up in two files before the door. She came into the court shading her eyes from the sun and looking round for the mistress. The pupils moved aside, glancing up at the beautiful chestnut hair, at the motherly bold face which became incredibly tender as she recognised some of her child's friends, and whose expression resembled that of the Mater Dolorosa when she caught sight of her little pale Anna, standing between two healthy children. She was not clever at disguising her feelings, and walked past the child towards Davidée with the same grief-stricken expression.

"Be careful of her, Mademoiselle, make her take some lunch here, she scarcely eats at all; she is very ill."

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"Certainly, I will take care of her," replied the assistant mistress, giving the signal to enter class.

And the sun rose higher over the roof of the classroom, and over the garden where three ancient hyacinths raised their stricken heads to the sky.

At midday Anna Le Floch and two other children who paid Mademoiselle Renée a small contribution went into the kitchen to take some soup. Anna scarcely tasted the portion Davidée had served her.

"Eat," whispered her little companion, nudging her, "it will do you good."

She shook her head, as one who is certain that there is no cure possible, and held out her transparent hands to the fire.

Meanwhile the two mistresses were also taking some soup at the further end of the table.

"What is it?" asked Davidée.

"Tuberculosis, rickets, perhaps worse. Lots inherit this sort of thing from their fathers."

"Who is the father?"

"I don't know."

"Haven't you seen him during the six months you have been here?"

"No."

"I think she has a heavier burden of grief than she can bear. Have you noticed her eyes? She never looks one in the face for fear of betraying her heart."

"I think she is shy."

"She would naturally wish to disguise her grief. I am immensely sorry for her."

"I have some letters to answer, would you mind taking the recreation?"

Davidée nearly always superintended the recreation before afternoon school. The children hurried back to play, and she often joined in their games. To-day, however, she was content to watch them from a distance, they had been arriving in twos and threes since half-past twelve.

The sun was shining, and the air felt quite warm as Davidée walked up and down the garden-path with little Anna Le Floch. Though they were walking very slowly the child's fair hair was quite damp and clinging to her temples with sweat. Davidée had taken her arm, and though Anna tried to disengage herself and run away, Davidée's gentle manner and kind words had half tamed the child. Anna fully realised that the young teacher for the moment had no other interest but herself, that her heart was open, and she, the little sick child, reigned in it. They walked up and down in the pleasant sunshine, chatting about Ardésie and the school; the laughter of the romping children seemed far distant, deadened by the wind. Tears stood in little Anna's eyes, and yet she was almost happy.

"Do you love me, Anna, tell me?"

"Oh, yes, very much."

"Then why are you so sad? Tell me about it, I want to help you. Is it because you are ill?"

"No."

"Then why?"

The child hung her head, and stopped.

"I am sad."

"But why?"

"I don't know. Tired, tired of living."

"Are you sad because your father has gone away?" asked Davidée, pressing her arm.

The little body trembled.

"He went away, and has never come back," murmured the child in a hoarse hesitating voice.

"Long ago?"

"Not this year, nor last, nor the year before. I may have been three or four months old, and now I am twelve."

"Twelve years, with suffering added, are equal to fifteen or sixteen, poor child."

"Yes, yes. But I did not want another father, and mama has given me one."

"Does he live with you?"

"Morning and evening. He does not come home in the middle of the day. He is a workman up there."

"Yes, I know."

"He wants me to love him, but I don't love him."

The wild green eyes were raised to Davidée, who saw hatred in them, youthful, deep, instinctive hatred. No name was mentioned, the child lowered her eyes, and the corners of her mouth drooped.

"I would like to kill myself," she said.

"What are you saying, Anna, you have not the right to kill yourself, Anna, no one has the right."

"Why not?"

The mistress hesitated a moment. An unusual screaming came from the courtyard, the children were pursuing a rat that had come out of a shed. Davidée resumed her walk, and as she drew the deserted, lonely, desperate

child along she noticed that they had been standing near the bed which had been the most recently dug.

"I'll be your friend, shall I? I will go to see you when you cannot come here. When you wish to cry, I will console you. I know well what it is to suffer."

The hard reserved look had come back to Anna's face. She made her way to the courtyard and entered it.

The afternoon passed like every other, but about four an incident happened which disturbed the whole school. A few minutes before the close of school, it was Mademoiselle Renée's custom to give out a moral maxim with a few words of explanation. She called this a secular prayer, as she had heard the custom styled in other schools. She submitted these points of meditation beforehand to the inspector. The preceding day she had developed with a verbal facility which arrested the attention of her chiefs, the maxim. "Time is money."

The secular prayer for the 24th of March was "Alcoholism is slow suicide"

The twenty-five pupils listened as pupils do when their eyes are fixed on the clock, which is about to strike the hour of deliverance. There was a continual noise of closing pen-boxes and copy-books, and of books being slipped into bags or pockets. Two or three children more intelligent than the rest listened with interest, and Anna Le Floch, sitting the last on the bench under the light of the window, listened with passionate eagerness. Bending low, her chin

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almost touching the desk, her cheeks resting on her hands, one could see nothing but a face waxen white, and two black-rimmed, staring eyes. Mademoiselle Renée, who was short-sighted and had put away her eyeglasses, had no idea that her words were being followed with such eagerness; she could not see Anna's face, and the agony in the child's eyes.

"The children of an alcoholic father or mother," she said, "are often degenerate, sickly, infirm, derelicts of life, sometimes criminals. We must pity them. But what a responsibility for the parents. To die young through the fault of those who have given us life! I hope I shall never lose one of my pupils from this or any other inherited ill. I should be too grief-stricken. I sometimes ask myself what I should do if one of my children were to disappear. You know that I do not believe in the immortality of the soul. I believe in the transformation of matter. If I were to lose a little girl I would not pray for her, that would be a waste of time, I would sow and plant flowers on her tomb, and go and drink in their perfume."

"Mademoiselle! Anna, Anna is dead."

The whole class was standing.

"Her eyes are closed, Mademoiselle, oh, how white she is."

Some of the children were pulling her by the sleeve, but the child was motionless, her head resting on the desk.

"She is dead, dead, she can't hear us."

Piercing cries were beginning on all sides, but the headmistress was quickly by the side of

Anna, whom she stretched full length on the bench, saying with authority :

"She has only fainted, it is nothing. Don't scream, don't make a noise. Call Mademoiselle Davidée. I assure you you will see your little comrade to-morrow."

The assistant mistress came running. The children withdrew, some of them hanging round the door to see whether Anna moved, but she did not. Her eyes were closed, her mouth half open and as blue as the rims round her eyes. Davidée had taken her up and was sitting on a stool with the child across her knees. The child's head rested on the assistant teacher's right arm, and with her left the latter was undoing the grey dress.

"Some water, please Mademoiselle, as quick as you can."

Renée Desforbes ran to the pump in the yard and returned with a wet handkerchief, which she pressed to Anna's temples, but without rousing her.

"Lay her on my bed," she said.

"On mine, if you will allow me. She knows me well, and will be glad to see me when she recovers."

She was no heavier than a child of six, poor little Anna. Davidée picked her up without an effort ; she had a motherly feeling for the child and was very anxious. She crossed the yard and was about to go up the stairs when Anna opened her eyes.

"It's all over," she said. "I must go home. I want to see mama."

The headmistress was following, holding the child's forgotten sabots.

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"Take her into the kitchen; she can't go home yet."

Sitting close to the fire Anna refused to eat or drink, the great popular remedy, and would not speak even to Davidée.

"I want to go home. I don't want to die here," she kept repeating, moving her feet with a rhythmic movement.

"Go home? But can you walk?" asked Renée.

For the first time the child gave a direct answer, and her "yes" was so firm that Renée immediately turned to her assistant.

"Since you asked me to leave her to you, will you take her home? I don't think there is any danger. It is not far"

Slowly, silently, but contentedly, Davidée and Anna crossed the courtyard and passed out on the road. It was half-past five.

Oh, the wonderful beauty of an afternoon in early spring when the wind falls and the sun holds promise of warmth, when the motionless branches heavy with buds bask in the light of the golden west. Even the countryside of Ardésie looked beautiful, like some plain girl embellished by a secret joy.

They were alone at first, the teacher and sick pupil, but as they reached the crossways, on the road leading to the village of Eclateries they saw a third figure leaning against the wall. A little girl with a basket on her arm, the pockets of her apron bulging with books, a child with round rosy cheeks and large tranquil eyes, wearing a white woollen cap and well mended mittens. Who had sent Jeannie Fete-Dieu to wait for them? Well, that was her secret.

She came forward and took Anna's right arm as Davidée was holding the left.

"Mademoiselle," she said, "grandmama would so much like to see you. She has scalded herself."

She asked no permission to accompany them, taking for granted that she, the first in the school and the best behaved, had a right to accompany her little sick companion. And very carefully she walked that she might not stumble and shake Anna.

The long stone walls on either side of the way were occasionally pierced by windows not made to open.

"Would you like to rest, child?"

"No, thank you, I can walk."

She did not speak, but her eyes sought a long low roof, the roof of Phrosine's poor house. And now they came to it. Standing on a little piece of uncultivated ground, surrounded by a wooden fence on three sides and a live hedge in front. The poor dwelling was built on a vast estate belonging to a market gardener, whose house could be seen in the distance.

"I have never been here before," said Davidée.

She opened the gate and entered with the two children so noiselessly that Phrosine heard nothing. Twilight was falling, a last golden ray lingered in the sky. The ailing child disengaged her left arm abruptly, threw it round Davidée's neck and kissed the cheek offered to her with the tenderness of a conquered soul. Jeannie Fete-Dieu had left them and was already out of sight. Phrosine came out of the house and walked down the little grassy path to

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the road. Her face wore an expression of the deepest anxiety, which vanished as she saw Anna.

"I am better," said the child, "don't scold me, mama."

"I bet she has fainted again. Did she faint, Mademoiselle? Naughty child, come and let me put you to bed. I have put clean sheets on your bed."

She picked the child up and carried her to the house, as Davidée had carried her in the school. Phrosine, the wild and immoral Phrosine was whispering tender, loving words as she bent over her child.

"Sleep well, won't you? Promise me. Look, the jonquil has flowered to welcome you. Isn't it pretty?"

But their eyes and souls were holding a secret dialogue to which the mother was accustomed, for well she knew what her child's anguished eyes were asking. She knew why no words of hers could comfort her little sick girl, why the child was unresponsive, why she paid no heed to the flowering jonquil. Anna's tired, worn face turned to the door with an expression of fear.

"No, he is not there," said the mother; then, "don't put on that expression, it breaks my heart. He has gone to a meeting at Bel-Air—there is talk of a strike, so you see he is not there. I assure you he isn't."

The little face changed, gratitude and prayerful hope came into the child's eyes as she looked at her mother in much the same way as she had looked at the school teacher.

Phrosine entered the house, and Davidée, who was following, saw her push open an inner door, carrying her burden into another room.

"There, now go to sleep as you promised me. I'll bring some lime tea well sweetened."

A stranger hearing her would have thought she was speaking to a small child.

Davidée looked round the living room with its smoky ceiling and yellow walls, upon which hung several out-of-date calendars sent round as advertisements, and some pictures of smiling women with bare shoulders and arms. She remembered that her father had similar pictures in his room at Blandes, only in golden frames. In the further corner was a wooden bedstead, from which she turned away. The large fire-grate must have warmed many a family without the chimney jutting out into the room; in a niche by the side of the grate was a man's cap.

Phrosine came back.

"The child is sleeping, but she would not take the lime tea, nor anything that I offered her."

She closed the oak door carefully.

"She is very ill; I thank you for bringing her home. Not everyone would have done so."

"My conscience would have reproached me had I done otherwise. She is my pupil, or at least our pupil."

"Who loves you, I can answer for that."

"Poor child."

The young girl remembered the story Renée had told her of Phrosine. It was like a third person, a silent witness standing between them, embarrassing to both women, who were well aware of the silent hostile presence. They exchanged words of gratitude or sympathy, but both felt the weight of unspoken words, and Davidée's hand was not offered to the other

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woman, and her glance had barely rested upon her; both knew that between them stood that third sinful figure.

"Someone has spoken to you about me?" said Phrosine. "I could see that this morning, and I see it now."

Their eyes met now defiantly, and Davidée, a pure, noble, brave girl as she was, raised her head.

"Yes, it is true. I heard your story last night."

"Well, let's talk it over, if you like. You need not be afraid of meeting him. He won't be in before seven; I told the child so. You are in the house of a woman who is living with a man who is not her husband. I had nothing to live on. Why do you look at me like that? You look as though you were about to fall from the height of your grandeur. I hide nothing, anyway. If you would like to sit down, I will tell you a few things you should know before judging."

Davidée hesitated for a moment, and then sat down near the fireplace, almost facing the window. Phrosine was against the light, but there was light in her green eyes and a ruddy glow on her cheeks. Passion, strong will and defiance sounded in the phrase "I hide nothing," which she had thrown at Davidée, but her voice was low and restrained for fear it should penetrate to the next room.

"I don't seem much to you, do I?" she enquired, "the woman who comes to sweep the classrooms and light the stove."

"You are quite mistaken."

"Clean up the courtyard, and flush the drains,

while you do the learned lady. I am not of your world ; you make me feel that."

"Since I bring up your child, and the daughters of all the women in Ardésie, what have you to reproach me with ?"

"Your manner, which is not the same with all."

The young girl blushed.

"Until last night I was quite friendly to you. Now, well, things have changed. I cannot help it. I am not mistress of my feelings."

"That is obvious."

"Why don't you marry him ?"

"I should have to be free."

"Are you not ?"

"I am married."

"That makes it worse. I came to render you a service, not to discuss your morals. Let me go."

But Phrosine wanted to make a confession.

"You should not despise me," she said, "you don't know how unhappy I have been. I lived three years with my husband, a carpenter ; he left me, he did worse, he stole my son whom I have never seen again, and I heard he had abandoned the child, leaving it at the refuge in Paris. That is twelve years ago. Where is my son ? Where is my husband ? I was pregnant. And then my child was born, the little girl whom you brought home to-day. I was single-handed to earn my living and hers. I waited three years for my husband to return. I went through misery, I can tell you. I worked for a few pence to keep the child with me. And then I could not live alone any longer, I had no money, no courage, and so I took up with a man. And not

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Maieul either, you understand? What was to prevent me?"

"But—the law."

"The law, does it feed me?"

"But custom, morals—you might——"

"What?"

"Get divorced."

"What good would that do? We dispensed with permission. Haven't we all the right to dispose of our bodies?"

"No, certainly not."

"Do you suppose then that it is the Mayor, who gives permission? You tell those tales to the children. But the law, Mademoiselle, is like habits; you pay attention to it if you are rich and have the time, and you are somebody. But me, who cared about me? I could do as I liked, die even without upsetting my neighbours. I had none. I lived in that house there just below La Gravelle, where he lives now. Ah, I see I upset you by talking like this, but I don't want to appear better than I am. Your morals are what you wish, mine are what I am able to make them. Don't be hard, you'll find others like me when you know Ardésie better. That was not what I wanted to talk to you about, though."

Davidée could find little to say in answer to the paradoxes which Phrosine glibly uttered, and she was angry with herself for her poor defence of a just cause.

"The trouble is," continued Phrosine, "that the child hates him. He is at his wits' end to invent things to please her, but she won't look at him nor speak to him, and I tell you frankly she infuriates me."

"Your conduct is killing her, such things have happened."

"Dying because I love Maieul Jacquet and cannot live without him? Mademoiselle, you are hard on us poor folk, but at least you do not disguise your thoughts. I don't think a girl could die of that."

"I am quite sure of it. I understand her."

"But she suffers, and so do I, and so does he. I wanted to tell you; you were surprised when he dug your garden the other day."

"Partly, I thought he wanted to render me a service."

"No, it was a service to her. You don't know him, he is more tender-hearted than a woman, with all his appearance of glumness. He knew she was fond of you, and thought if he did that for you, Anna would be pleased. He told her all about it when he came back."

"What did she say?"

"Nothing, as usual. She drank three spoonfuls of soup, and went back to bed. When she is there," said Phrosine pointing to the child's room, "she is happy, whether she is coughing or feverish, hungry or thirsty, she never calls, she does not live with us. I can assure you life is not gay and I have had enough of it!"

The assistant schoolmistress felt a burning desire to open the bedroom door, to lean over the little bed, to embrace her pupil and whisper to her, "I am on your side, you have a great friend in me, I understand your touching purity."

She dared not. In spite of her naturally impulsive character, habits of discipline had already tempered her daring spirit. It would be

imprudent, she thought, and went out with just a glance in the direction of the child's room.

Outside, twilight reigned supreme over the country; hedges, currant bushes, stone heaps stood out formless masses in the dim light, indistinguishable one from the other. The schoolmistress passed before Phrosine and walked down the path and opened the gate. Sky, fields, and hills were wrapped in infinite silence. From the neighbouring streets came only muffled sounds of voices, steps, or passing carts: Phrosine had followed Mademoiselle Birot down the path

"Do you believe she could die of it?"

"Nobody can be sure. I spoke hastily under the stress of emotion."

"But you think it possible? You think my child Anna——?"

Davidée graspéd the fact that her reply might have serious consequences should she answer "yes, I think it might cause her death," possibly the remnant of conscience struggling as it heard might develop into remorse, and who could say what the result would be.

"Yes," she replied, with an effort, and disappeared quickly in the twilight. She was afraid. The great silence over the country impressed her, large tufts of ivy growing here and there on the low walls took the shape of a man leaning on his elbows. She dreaded hearing the sounds of steps pursuing her. And, indeed, as she went from Phrosine's, Maieul returned. He needed no long explanation to grasp what had happened. A few phrases which Phrosine repeated of their conversation sufficed. Anger seized him, he flung out of the house,

banged the gate, and ran down the road. She had reached the first of the deserted roads of Champ-Robert when she heard rapid footsteps approaching, sometimes distinct, sometimes deadened by the dust. There was still a glimmer of light so even by standing motionless against the wall, she could not hope to escape the notice of her pursuer, and that her pursuer was Maieul, she had no doubt. Who else could hasten like that after a day's work in the heavy atmosphere of the March night, which seemed to sap one's energy? He walked with the quick step of a farmer hastening to fetch the veterinary for a sick animal.

"Here, you there, schoolmistress," he began to call.

She left the middle of the road, and stood against the wall, her arms hanging straight by her side, her heart beating, her face turned towards the approaching man.

"I'll soon catch you up," he shouted, "there's no use trying to run away." She feared that her white collar would instantly betray her, indeed it seemed as though her white face and shining eyes must be visible even in the twilight.

"Since I cannot avoid him," she thought, "I will not scream, I will not run, I will walk to meet him."

And suddenly his great form loomed out of the darkness on the other side of the way, his head reached above the wall, his hat pushed back. He did not see the young girl, but as he stopped ten yards from her, still calling. "Hi, you schoolmistress," she walked across and stood in front of him saying calmly :

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"What do you want with me, M. Maieul Jacquet?"

He turned quickly.

"Why are you calling out for me? I thought you were more polite, I suppose you have drunk too much."

As it was the truth, he pulled off his hat and apologised.

For a moment speech forsook him, surprise had broken the torrent of reproaches he had been repeating to himself as he came up. But the words returned to his memory, and the hand which held his hat trembled with anger.

"I have just come from the house."

"Not yours."

"The one that pleases me I learnt that you had brought the child home."

"Again not yours. Did I not do the right thing?"

"Yes, I don't reproach you for that. But you let your tongue get the better of you. Why did you interfere in what is no business of yours? Why did you tell Phrosine the child would die?"

"She asked me."

"You want her to drive me away? You would be the cause of her driving me away?"

The schoolmistress forgot all conventions.

"So much the better," she replied, in virginal indignation.

"Ah! you want her to desert me. You will repent those words."

"It is your place to repent. You—who are living an evil life, you—the lover of a married woman."

"Who would have died of starvation but for me."

"Support her if you will, but stay in your own house, and then you may boast of your charity. You are driving a child to despair, you are killing a tender heart, worth a thousand of yours. Take that from a woman who has no fear of you. You are cowardly, you know wherein duty lies; in living an honest life, in sacrificing yourself, and you don't do it, you have no pity. You say you love the child——"

"I do."

"And you will do anything but what her stricken heart desires. You won't leave her mother, you are afraid that she will drive you away, giant as you are. I call you weak, you have no will power. I forbid you to follow me. Good-evening."

She re-arranged the woollen scarf which covered her head and shoulders, lifted her skirt, though it was short, passed before Maieul, and resumed her walk to Ardésie.

In spite of his semi-intoxication the man had understood every word. They penetrated to the lucid part of his brain. "A brave little woman," he said to himself before she had gone ten yards.

"I say, Mademoiselle," he called out, as she disappeared in the darkness, "where did you learn your morals?"

She heard but made no reply, she was already some distance. The houses near the school were silhouetted against the sky like vast clouds similar to the heavy rain-clouds scurrying overhead before the sea wind. A human form could be distinguished before the school door, it advanced a step, hesitated, and finally called out

"There you are at last. I was anxious. How late you are."

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Mademoiselle Renée kissed her assistant.

"You are hot, you are trembling. What has happened?"

They entered the kitchen, closing the door of the courtyard behind them, and Davidée retailed her visit to Phrosine. But she did not mention her encounter with Maieul.

"Mademoiselle," said Renée, after listening to what Davidée had told Phrosine, "this is more serious than you think. If you want to live in peace you must hold your tongue. Observe all that goes on but say nothing. Take moral ethics as a study for the classroom, but out of school appear to forget the lesson."

"I should have some trouble."

"Yes, but you must. I shall be surprised if your adventure ends here."

"Because I took pity on a child? Because I told a woman that, being married, it was wrong to lead an immoral life?"

"What a word. What can it matter to you?"

"Does it make no difference to you?"

"None. Words. Morality is a lesson I teach in class, according to a changing programme, the geography of sand banks. It is such as the Inspector requires or the minister. They are the heads of religion. It's their business, not mine. It is my duty to say 'Amen' But my thoughts on the subject are my own. I live as I choose and let others do the same. My poor little assistant, if you go in for moral solicitude for people who have no morals, or if you have a set of principles, hide them or you are done for."

She was laughing, quite pleased to see her

companion home again. Davidée was boiling water on a spirit lamp and replying merely with phrases suitable to a subordinate.

"Do you really think so? I shall find it difficult to appear indifferent—I will try—it will take time—if you could have seen Anna so ill, and even more unhappy than ill."

Having swallowed a cup of tea she wiped the moisture from her eyes, humid both from emotion and from her walk in the open air.

"I don't want any dinner."

"Baby."

"I shall be better alone, my nerves are unstrung."

Renée looked at her steadily.

"Alone! You have just experienced how much alone you are. Well, good-night. Do you know that you look very pretty with your tremulous desolate look?"

Davidée waved a good-bye and went upstairs.

The room was tidy. She noticed with a feeling of pleasure that the counterpane hung smoothly, that the chair was pushed carefully under the table, that the two other chairs were in their place and books and ornaments carefully arranged. She did not analyse her feelings. She was content to know that the harmony of the room gave her a sense of security and of comfort.

She placed the lamp by the side of the inkstand, untied her scarf, but did not remove it. In all seasons, hot and cold, a certain amount of wind penetrated through the window from the garden.

"This is my refuge," she thought. "I am at peace here. Outside I meet with nothing but

contradiction and a sense of powerlessness, and what rottenness. I am surrounded by it. I feel that the more as I grow older. There are other evils that I can but guess at, and of which I am afraid."

She looked at herself in the glass over the little alarm clock and saw an ardent self-willed face glowing with youth, the picture of one who knows not peace. She thought of her mother, unmoved, probably uninterested, by any theory put forward by Birot, master stonecutter.

"I am just the reverse," she murmured. "I think that moral wretchedness even more than any other weighs on me, and if it were anywhere round me would prevent me feeling happy unless I could cure or attempt to cure it"

Her black hair blown by the wind had fallen and was hanging over her eyebrows; she pulled it back that it might harmonize with the tidy room and sat down before the table.

She opened a drawer with a key hanging to her watch-chain and took out a green note-book in which she was accustomed to write when she longed for a confidant, and that was often. The book lay among others older still which she had brought from the school at La Rochelle among dried flowers tied with ribbon and packets of letters.

"I am afraid," she wrote down, "of questioning the wisdom of my choice of life. I am not fitted for the policy of effacement I am advised to adopt. Why should I not follow the instinct which prompts me to succour wounded souls, and why should I refuse to judge when asked to do so? Scarcely anything I do in this place is done whole-heartedly and with all my

strength. I spoke freely just now, and it appears I crossed the boundary of my rights. I did not go to Phrosine to surprise her secret or to cross-examine her. I felt as though I were Anna's sister. I would have suffered too, had I been she. To see one's mother leading an evil life, to be compelled to love and unable to respect; to have to cede first place in your mother's affections to a man who has no right to share her love; to buy one's daily bread at such a price! I too should die of it, as she is doing. I shall never hold my tongue before a natural and such a touching grief. Phrosine's assurance is amazing, duty does not exist for her; it seems that she considers that love and poverty exempt her from being an honest woman and a good mother."

Having written these lines the young girl shut the book, and began looking in the drawer for a large note-book with an india-rubber band, which contained her notes upon Mademoiselle Hacquin's, the Professor of Psychology's, lectures.

"I must look up my notes on Moral Ethics," she thought, "since I am called upon to defend my position"

She turned over pages and pages of manuscript written in her neat, strongly characteristic hand, until she found the sought-for passage.

"There are four kinds of moral problems," she read, "the metaphysical, such as the existence of God, and a future life; the formal and abstract, as the question of happiness; real and social problems; and casuistical problems. Does there exist a Supreme Being? Who is He? An infinitely abstract idea, far removed from human conduct. Let us eliminate

hypotheses. Should one associate necessary and true ideas such as Moral Ethics, with uncertain ideas? Why should we establish a connection between things unconnected by a rational link? Moral Ethics might be comprised by so doing. If you wish the latter to be solidly established, you must dissociate metaphysics and morality.

"Ah, here is what I want. Duty—varies according to the exactions of society in which one lives. How can I know what society demands? I should recognize this by the sanction of society, the sanction of public opinion, and the sanction of effective penalties for transgression of certain rules. Duty is the common form of all activity, industrial, economic, hygienic, the outcome of experience, not a new departure tending to experiment indefinitely upon accepted principles. Our duty is our will disentangled from emotion. The organ of Moral Ethics is a social phenomenon, they depend upon society, which may reject ancient customs."

Davidée stopped, overcome by sudden anguish. What was all this? Had she lived on such a doctrine? Act like everyone else, was that what she had been taught to do? And this was called a standard of morality. She thought she possessed a standard of morality. In point of fact she had not followed it, she had lived otherwise, she had followed the example of honesty and rectitude given by her mother, sometimes by her father, or by certain persons whom she knew to be in the right. But these others, where had they imbibed their knowledge? They were better than their neighbours, because

in difficult circumstances they had risen above common cowardice. With what nonsensical inefficient doctrine had she been armed? Follow the weakness of others, of men and women seeking truth and contradicting one another, and almost one and all succumbing to the attractions of the minute. To find public opinion on your side one day, and against you on the morrow; the same deed approved yesterday and condemned to-day. What sort of moral standard was this? It seemed to the poor young girl that she had opened a box in which she had hidden a fortune, only to find her treasure vanished.

She threw the book back in the drawer and hid her face in her hands. Mademoiselle Renée was coming upstairs. The three middle stairs gave out their usual groan.

Davidée for one moment feared that the headmistress would enter and see that her anxiety, trouble, and weariness had increased. She guessed that Renée had paused on the landing, surprised to see light still burning. But the door on the other side of the landing closed, and the schoolhouse was plunged in the harmony of night.

Leaning over her table, Davidée took up her pen and began to write :

"What kind of rule can public opinion offer for the interior life? What a judge for wounded intimate purity? What assurance can it offer to me or to Anna Le Floch, or what consolation? Submit my thoughts, grief, sympathies, dreams to public opinion? How can the latter fortify me in temptation, since it refuses to recognize temptation, sin or victory? Each

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person delivered to the multitude! No! No! The opinion of Ardésie, of the town, of the whole world, I reject it. I am not a prisoner of the customs, prejudices, passions of human beings like myself who can only say to me: 'We are the whirlwind, we are dust and noise, we approve of you to-day, reserving to ourselves the right to condemn you to-morrow.' I cannot understand how Mademoiselle Hacquin's teaching can have had any influence over me. Has it influenced any single act of my life? I ask myself the question for the first time to-night, and I do not think that I gave such teaching anything but the assent of a pupil more concerned with an examination than with truth. Chance has brought me face to face with absolute immorality, and I find that my inner self, from which springs life and energy, rises in protest. I lost control of myself. And now I find that if Phrosine could follow a line of reasoning I should have been left without an argument. Her very life is an argument, she rejects all duties that she finds irksome—because she does not consider that they are sufficiently sanctioned. She is not the mistress of a school, she is very poor, she loves that man, what does she care for public opinion? And are her neighbours severe, do they not view her conduct indulgently? According to Mademoiselle Hacquin, she could claim moral sanction. And I who thought I could teach others, what guarantee do I offer them? Mademoiselle Renée is right, though, I must be prudent, but I feel abandoned, and have no one whose help I can ask. I have no confidence in my headmistress, her intelligence is just supple,

assimilating, vulgarising. She receives ideas already digested. They are of supreme indifference to her, provided they bear the stamp 'current coin.' I don't trust her. To-night she embraced me with a vehemence that displeased me. I am in the midst of unforeseen troubles. To overcome them I have but my instinct as guide, examples remembered in my childhood. That is my only lantern for the darkness of night. I will go on, I will not change, I will not be silent, but I shall suffer."

She sat dreaming by her table for some time. The details of the day came up for judgment. She regretted nothing, but could not overcome her feeling of anxiety. What part would she play in the drama which was commencing? Where should she turn for help? She felt that Davidée Birot, Phrosine, Anna Le Floch, Maleul Jacquet would meet again, that there would be a sequel to the day's adventure, and that fate held trials, perhaps light, perhaps heavy, for the lonely desolate soul watching among the once blue, but now sullen black hills of Ardésie.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRIUMPH OF THE GOLDEN PLANT

NOTHING of importance happened for some weeks, if the coming of spring can be called unimportant.

Anna Le Floch came back to school on the Monday following her fainting fit, but the ills from which she was suffering had not decreased. She sat in the courtyard during the recreation hour ; her companions would bring a chair and make her sit down, standing round her all chattering at once in the hope of amusing her ; but on the slightest pretext they would bound away and join the romping group of children, screaming louder than all the rest, deeming they deserved some reward for their momentary charity. The sick child was well used to it. She was neither astonished nor grieved at being left alone. Her untamed eyes, which formerly avoided those of the mistresses, now sought Davidée's ; they rested on the picture of the young girl walking up and down with the bigger children and joining in the games of the little ones. The tenderness in Anna's eyes denoted that it was not mere curiosity which prompted her to watch Davidée. The latter scarcely perceived the child's interest in her. She saw Phrosine daily ; the two women exchanged a courteous good-morning, because working in the

same house it was not possible to ignore one another ; beyond that—they never spoke a word. Renée, however, had become so expansive that she appeared almost benevolent. She was expecting promotion. Certain words let drop, which had been repeated to her at a meeting of teachers had given her the hope of a change, perhaps a berth in a school in a town. The Inspector had not definitely mentioned the word "town," but the flattering manner in which he had spoken of Mademoiselle Desforges could be interpreted in that sense.

To leave Ardésie, to vegetate no longer, to be free from "educating the daughters of the poor and of savages," her favourite phrase, and to live among petty officials and tradespeople, to receive and pay visits, to walk once again on asphalt pavement, she aspired after these joys as though they were supreme and eternal. To obtain them she was prepared beforehand to do anything. She was persuaded that for a long time the measure of her merit was overflowing. Every letter she received was opened in the expectation that it contained the long wished-for news.

"I won't forget you," she sometimes said to her assistant. "I think you are much too intelligent and, allow me to say, much too pretty to be left in exile indefinitely."

"I can assure you," Davidée would reply, "I feel quite at home here. I have taken root in Ardésie."

Maieul Jacquet had not carried out his threats of vengeance. He had not been seen in the schoolhouse or in the road near. A good woman who sometimes brought her little girl to

school remarked one morning to Davidée upon it.

"It's strange," she said, "I often used to meet that great Sobersides on his way to his workshop, but I never see him now. I suppose he's changed his way."

It was the eve of the holidays. For the last five years Davidée had been in the habit of spending her Easter holidays at Blandes; she found her father feebler, but more authoritative than ever; her mother older. Their beautiful new house, the envy of the whole of Blandes, showed no sign of the winters it had known save the thin lines of green mould which spread like iris leaves over the stones at its base. For the first time Davidée and her mother conversed of things unconnected with the weather, house-keeping, the difficulty of finding servants and the rivalry perpetually springing up against Birot's power, his success or his iron will, a rivalry which he overthrew with a gesture. Davidée had no need to ask for the last scandal of Blandes, a young wife deceived by her husband and the flight of the latter with another woman.

"How horrible it all is," concluded Madame Birot.

"So many do likewise."

"What do you say? You don't mean that you approve of such things? If the whole of Blandes were to absolve her, I should blame her, and I say unhesitatingly that she is a hussy."

"I like to hear you say that, mother, it's a strong word for you to use."

"Yes, a hussy. I don't mind telling you that once I, too, was pretty, and had a graceful figure."

She smoothed out her skirt as she was speaking.

"Yes, I was admired, sweet words were whispered to me, musical as the verses you recite, but, thank God, I have not even an illicit glance on my conscience."

"Because you are the best of women, mama, and because you have never loved."

"But I loved your father, as much as it is possible, in spite of some disputes."

"I mean you loved no one else."

"I should think not indeed, you're mad."

"But since you have no religion, what was to prevent you?"

"No religion! I have a little, as you well know, what your father lets me have, which is not much, but one can be faithful without being devout! There is——"

"What?"

"Honour."

"Ah, my dear mother, I have met people whose idea of honour is to stand by the woman they love, who yet is not their wife. We can always find words to serve our purpose. The important, the agonising problem is to give them their real meaning. Men read their own meaning into them, yes, and women too."

Madame Birot feeling unarmed for argument threw her arms round her daughter.

"You see many sad things in your profession," she said passionately, "I have often thought so. I wanted to keep you with me, but you would not let me! Tell me truthfully, have you a heartache?"

"No, mama, rather a headache."

Madame Birot did not trouble to seek a reply

she contented herself by asking a question, a question constantly on the lips of mothers: "Why don't you get married?"

And the subject under discussion was instantly dropped.

Spring had come. When Davidée returned to Ardésie the heavens were renewed, and every patch of denuded earth was putting on a green covering. Even slates and stones were imbued with the Spring; they caught the sun on warm days, and threw back its rays, or shimmered in its light, with all the colours of the rainbow. The gardens were gay with wall-flowers and tulips, clipped hedges, and currant bushes. The blackbird sang joyously in the early morning, and the nightingale at night. But above all the little yellow flower of the broom had conquered the blue country far and wide. On the hills and in the plains, among broken stones and dusty soil, the graceful green plant raised its head laden with generous golden blooms. How lavish its perfume on the new wind. With primroses and hawthorn, it is the first divine colour of Spring. The glowing plant covered the desert made by men. But it flourished in the greatest abundance there, in the deserted districts, where Maieul Jacquet lived.

La Gravelle was a long one-storeyed house, flanked on the right by a terraced annexe, or rather, the architect, intending to make of it two separate dwellings, had built an outer staircase finishing in a room or raised court. Whether or no the house had in palmier days sheltered noble tenants, it was now inhabited by quite poor ones; two Breton families sharing the lower part, while the stone staircase and two roomy apartments

with high wide windows were tenanted by Maieul. All the windows and doors faced south. La Gravelle rose like a beacon over the country and commanded a fine view. At the back was a less important house inhabited by the Fete-Dieu family, and in the background the Valley of Lapin and the Valley of La Grenadière. Nowhere throughout the country had Nature been so generous as on the deserted hills surrounding La Gravelle. Between Maieul's house and the Fete-Dieu's stretched a garden of steep gold hills. Little valleys and embankments were covered with a wealth of broom, the country was glowing with it, before the surrounding land had barely answered to the call of Spring. It was a joy to the eye.

So thought Davidée on Thursday, April 22nd, the second after Easter, as she came up the valley of La Grenadière, where a woman was washing among the rushes. She walked along the edge of the pond, climbed a bank and caught sight of La Gravelle and the splash of golden broom stretching from the house to where she stood. At the same instant a gust of soft wind, laden with sweet perfume, enveloped her with a caressing touch.

"Ah, how delicious!" she cried, "all Spring is in the air; could it but blow through the school; could it but fan my heart!"

She was going to see Mother Fete-Dieu, as she had promised to do before the holidays. But her thoughts were also with Maieul Jacquet.

"He passes for a maker of songs and a fine singer; he would do better to live an honest life, or at least learn to be polite. The idea of

running after me the other night, calling out to me. I have met Phrosine at least twenty times since then, but she has never spoken to me. He has changed his route coming and going to his work. It is all I have gained from either of them."

She remembered that it was a week since she had seen Anna, and that all she knew was that the child was worse, and never went beyond the garden. She followed a rarely trodden path between the broom, climbed an embankment, pushing aside the flowering branches which brushed her cheeks, and in a bend of the road discovered a low-lying house. She tapped at the door, and a young woman answered. Davidée entered. Round-eyed Jeannie came forward and smiled at sight of her.

"How good of you to come. Grandmama is better, you know. Shè is over there."

"One is always better until one goes off," said a feeble voice from the end of the room. The old woman was lying in a bed hung with green serge curtains. She was half-paralysed. One eye was still quite good and bright, the other dim and dull. The good eye looked Davidée up and down with pleasure. It watched her as though she were a sprig of broom or a flowering geranium opening to the sun on the window-sill, or a ray of daylight in the poor room.

The assistant bent her head smiling.

"You will get well this beautiful spring weather, Mother Fete-Dieu."

The old woman was following up a thought.

"Oh, it's you, the new mistress?" she said.

"Yes; but I have been here nearly seven months."

"She told me you were amiable. They are cute, those little things, they soon find out a good heart."

"But I assure you my heart is no better than my neighbours'."

"Oh yes, your eyes speak for it, it's young, and anxious to do good. Sit down, Mademoiselle. Jeannie, you little wretch, why have you not given Mademoiselle a chair?"

They began to chat; the old woman retailing her life, the young one listening, at first from charity, but soon with interest, for Grandmother Fete-Dieu, having given a few dates, names, births, illnesses and deaths, and said a few words as to her last trial, the illness which had left her bedridden, gave thanks for her seventy years of life, and made but a very feeble complaint upon her present sufferings.

"I am not very patient," said the good old woman. "When Jeannie is at school the time seems very long. Fortunately some Bretons from La Gravelle sometimes come to see me. I am fulfilling my time, gaining merit; God is at the end of my trouble."

She was tired, and closed her eyes. She lost count of time, and being seized with a sudden spasm of pain, opened her eyes abruptly. She did not see her visitor, already forgotten, but gazed upwards at the smoke-blackened beams.

"My God," she murmured, placing her still stalwart hand upon the other, which no longer obeyed her will, "I suffer greatly, but if it be Your will, I can suffer a little more," and, after a moment, lowering her voice, "just a little more."

The schoolmistress had grown quite pale;

she felt the same emotion as when she made her pupils repeat the beautiful phrases attributed to the illustrious dead. She sat and gazed at the sick woman, who was dozing, and then gently left the room, accompanied by Jeannie and the cat, who rubbed itself against her skirt.

La Gravelle faced her, perched on its hill, its row of chimneys glowing in all the splendour of the afternoon sun, but the back of it only could be seen ; its windows, its vines, its Breton women and their children were in the front, facing the Loire.* There was no noise save the buzzing of the flies, maddened by the glorious broom. Jeannie's whispered good-bye was drowned in their buzzing, which intensified rather than broke the silence.

"How sold I would be," thought Davidée, "if Maieul were to come down the hill towards me. I believe I should be frightened."

She turned to the right, skirted the hill, and as she was about to turn into a footpath, worn by constant use, she saw Maieul Jacquet a few paces ahead waiting for her.

He was dressed in his Sunday best. His clothes were brushed, he wore his best shoes, massive watch chain and green waistcoat, and his moustache was curled, as though he were bound to a wedding. As he saw Davidée, he removed his hat, and looked so shy that she was not frightened.

"I will pass in front of him," she thought, "bow to him stiffly, and he will gather that I have no favourable recollection of our last meeting. Why is he here? Did he see me leave the school from his workshop—it is not very far distant? Perhaps, by standing on a heap of

stones such sharp eyes might see our door. If so, he hurried home by a short cut while I was mooning along by La Grenadière, and changed his clothes while I was visiting Mother Fete-Dieu. What does he want to say to me? Does he think that he has simply to stand here in my way to make me forget his rudeness?"

She had the time to think things over because she slackened her walk in order not to appear frightened. She approached, lowering her eyes on account of the glare, raising them at times, to see the way. But as she looked at the path in front she caught sight of the workman standing on the left among the broom, holding his hat with both hands in front of him. He struck her as looking funny—and she smiled involuntarily. As she resumed her dignified and set look Maieul spoke.

"I behaved badly to you, Mademoiselle."

"That is true."

She did not stop.

"I did not know what I was doing, I am ashamed of myself."

"Thank you for telling me so, Monsieur Maieul."

She walked on, passed him, and was turning a corner.

"And yet by our parish church," he found the old word because his heart was touched, "there is no one whom I should be more grieved to offend."

Davidée stopped.

"Why, Monsieur Maieul?"

"Because you gave me my deserts, and prettily too."

"I thought I had spoken too frankly."

"No indeed."

"What good have I done, nothing has changed?" She looked at him, with a certain haughtiness and blushing vividly. He was silent for a minute.

"Change, that is harder to do than to say; it is easier to think you are right. All the same, supposing I did change?"

He did not finish his phrase, but for the first time he looked the proud young girl for whom he had waited a quarter of an hour among the broom, steadily in the face. She had no doubt as to his meaning.

"I should have a better opinion of you," she said.

And in view of these words, which were not a definite condemnation of him, although harshly spoken, he began to walk along by her side, but at a little distance from her. And as she descended, turning her head that she might not appear too attentive to the man at her side, he raised his eyes over the country and spoke as though he were addressing the valley.

"I have not your education, I have had no mother, no sister to speak to me of my salvation, or of paradise."

"Did I mention paradise?"

"No, but there was no mistaking your meaning! I have friends who live as I do; they don't care. It is no business of the overseer, nor yet of the director. There is only the priest; he would say the same as you—only I don't know him."

Davidée made no reply. They had reached a crossing, where stood a few very old houses.

"I see it annoys you to speak to me," said

Maieul hurriedly. "I did not mean to offend you. You are not as talkative as the other day. I wanted to tell you also that little Anna is always crying for you. Go and see her, Mademoiselle. You would do better not to go in, you can see her over the hedge."

He walked on three steps.

"Au revoir, Mademoiselle."

"Good-bye, Monsieur Maieul."

He turned to the left, and Davidée to the right. Without telling him, she had decided to go to the house in the Plains.

"Oh," she thought, "how all our acts have some result, and all our words an echo. Because I was justly indignant, here am I raised to the position of judge between a child, her mother, and her mother's lover. A tender heart, Anna's; a troubled heart, Maieul's; an inimical heart, Phrosine's. Even if I so desired I could not efface the change I have caused, close the springs I have opened, the misunderstandings I have fathomed, undo the good I have done, or the useless trouble I have taken. And yet I do not know why I was so severe. I acted as my mother would have done, and I can only defend myself by saying my instinct prompted me; some inner feeling was stronger than the lessons of my teachers. Those I blamed know better than I in whose name I spoke, the unique, the unique Power."

She felt but a poor little girl. Over the wall to the left she could see the stonebreakers at work. The younger ones nearest to her followed her with their eyes, making some jesting remarks to one another, which she could not hear. The older ones were as indifferent to the passing of

youth as they were to the balmy wind, which blew down from the hills.

Davidée walked on with alert step. Over the blue field she could see the row of sheltering stacks of slates, in long lines and everywhere men working with leisurely, measured movements. Some faces were savage, most were only serious; few wore an expression of gaiety, or of health that can mock at labour.

"I wish I could bring up your children that they might run into your homes like a breath of spring, which we inhale unconsciously. I teach them to read for themselves, to write for themselves; I teach them to be good and that is for you. But pleasure plays its part too; how many of them could I persuade to abstain from buying a new hat?"

As she turned into the street known as La Martinellerie, Davidée met several pupils of the elementary class. Mothers smiled good-day from behind windows, but she passed on, turning into the path which led to Phrosine's house. She softly approached the live hedge, now in full leaf, and presenting to the wind between their shining leaves little clusters of white flowers. The gardeners had ceased work. A group of magpies, the only moving things on the landscape, were circling round a large plot of wheat, which bent gracefully in the breeze. The door of the house was closed. Davidée half expected to see Anna appear leaning on Phrosine, returning from a walk. She went up to the gate. The sick child was lying asleep under a plum tree on two chairs, her head propped on pillows, her legs covered with a quilt which trailed on the ground. She was so

pale that she might have been asleep in death ; her arms hung down, her shabby bodice scarcely moved as she breathed. Life seemed to have left that pale worn frame, innocent scapegoat of the pleasures of others, dying from the effects of her father's intemperate drinking, paying the debt of bygone debauchery. As though souls far distant could meet in sleep, and recognise each other with certitude, Anna opened her eyes. Her face lit up ; life and joy appeared simultaneously in the child's face, she raised her hands and joined them together, as she said .

" I was thinking of you."

" Spring advised me to come."

" Yes, it's fine enough," replied Anna indifferent to all but her hymn of love. " You have come," she said in ecstasy. " I have been expecting you for some days. I am not very comfortable on these chairs, but you could not come to the house. It is better for you not to enter mama's house. I thought you did not wish to enter the house, so I asked to be brought out here. The first day you did not come, nor the second, nor the third : but here you are. Don't be afraid, Mademoiselle, mama cannot hear what I say, and she is very good to me just now. Let me see your hat."

" Look at it, am I in the right position ?"

" Yes, it is pretty."

" If I were near enough I would try it on you."

" Oh, no, you are pretty—it would be no use to me."

She did not finish her phrase, speaking in a dreamy voice.

The schoolmistress, hoping to distract her mind, began to talk of school ; but Anna's face

darkened at the first word, the interior light shining in her eyes went out. Youth seemed to fly from the child, leaving bare the anxious tender soul of a woman.

"Mademoiselle?"

"What is it child?"

"I want to ask you something, because I know you are good."

She hesitated, and her green eyes became dark with emotion.

"Should I pray?"

"Yes."

"Mademoiselle, there is a God, isn't there?"

The teacher shivered, but it was only apparent to the blackthorn on which she leant.

"Can I say no?" she thought, "have I the right to fill that soul with despair, I, who have voluntarily neglected to fathom the question?"

She smiled at Anna tremulously, and spoke tenderly; they seemed for the moment very equal.

"My little Anna, dear little child, I love you dearly."

She felt that in evading the child's question, she was cowardly and cruel

"I love you too, Mademoiselle."

"I will come back," said Davidée hurriedly, "but you must promise me to sleep well, just as though I were not coming, but you will see me again here at this spot."

The little pale face was raised a minute, and fell back again on the pillow.

"Not even to think of me?"

The small head made a negative movement. A tender smile flitted across the lips, the smile of a pure child, and Davidée moved away quickly as she felt tears spring to her eyes.

“Good-bye, darling.”

The hedge soon hid the sick child, Davidée returned to Ardésie, where the schoolhouse was deserted, Mademoiselle Desforges having gone to town to spend her afternoon holiday.

From the Green Note-Book.—“I am alone in the house, the broom-scented wind comes in from my open window ; it blows down from the hills of La Gravelle and La Grenadière, strikes against the left pane and blows over me and travels round the walls. It brings dust from the court trodden by the children, from the roads and workfields. Its perfume is not entirely intoxicating ; it is like the blended mixture of life. I am troubled at finding that I am weak in a rôle I never definitely desired, a rôle which is ever widening and becoming more complex ; which will drive me to decisions and assertions for which I am ill-prepared. I no longer fear Maieul Jacquet’s vengeance, but another thing, a passion which I have not provoked and find revolting. I saw it in his look, his gestures, his careful dress, the choice of spot where he awaited me, far from witnesses, in his voice. What an insult ! to speak to me in that manner when I know his life and with whom he lives. And yet my indignation scarcely seemed deep-rooted. Why did I let him continue ? Of what weak stuff am I made, in spite of appearances ? How Renée Desforges would taunt me if she knew or guessed. But it was another sort of cowardice I showed before Anna’s question. Her question is the epitomé of life, the enigma of her life and of mine. Her mind has developed in suffering and solitude. She sought a staff to lean on, she longed to know if there

exists a Consoler, a morrow after life, and she chose me to give an answer. I am her teacher. Impossible for a schoolmistress to ignore whether there be a paradise? The child desired a livelier faith to bear her sufferings better. The question was ready; she was thinking of it, while I conversed of other things. I gave no answer, I was afraid to say no, I was not courageous enough or pitiful enough to say yes. I told her to pray, for that commits one to nothing. Pray to whom? Before great suffering I gave half of the answer of a Christian which I am not Beggary, contradiction, but above all, beggary. Little ailing child, you had faith in the spring; I cannot alleviate your thirst; I am dry earth, hard stone like the hills around us, where hope, the source of life, is quickly exhausted. I have just a little for myself, but it rapidly evaporates. I do not know the reason I was brought into the world, and as I meet life in its nakedness I see that there is no science equal to that knowledge. It holds all the rest from whom do we come; whither are we going?

"I do not know! 'My little friend will die.' Her green eyes will close for ever. I shall not have answered her question. I have been teaching three years. When the little girls have passed my class and Mademoiselle Renée's in a few years they will become wives of farmers or workmen; with what weapons have I armed them? I doubt myself and them. Have I made hearts heavier and spread moral beggary in a world of material misery?"

Davidée paid two visits to the house in the Plains within ten days. She would have liked

to go more frequently, but copybooks to correct, visits of the parents to receive, and Mademoiselle Renée's remark that she was going out too frequently, had kept her at home.

The child was never spoken of now that she was no longer seen at school. Avoiding the assistant, Phrosine would sometimes say to the headmistress that things were going badly and they had no luck in her house. She nearly always came early before the mistresses were down; she swept the classrooms, watered the floors and, as she had no stove to light, would leave, having opened the door for the pupils.

The first time she revisited the house in the Plains, Davidée scarcely expected to find Anna out of doors. Every now and then sharp showers would fall, localised to a few fields, and shot like shells through a clear sky from distant storms. But Anna was there under shelter of an umbrella which Phrosine had suspended to a branch. She was breathing with ease and had some colour in her cheeks.

As soon as she had welcomed her friend the child said.

"I do beg you to answer the question you did not answer the other day."

"Have you made your first communion?" asked Davidée, who was prepared for the child's persistence.

"Certainly."

"I also, you see. Pray to Him since you feel the desire to do so"

"What are you going to do? Be careful."

Davidée had abruptly pushed open the gate and was coming over the grass, holding up her dress to prevent the noise of its swish against

the leaves. She came to the child and kissed her on the cheek. As she bent down she smelt the peculiar odour of fever and drew herself up quickly. The thought came to her and it amazed her.

"If I but had faith I would bend low again, smiling."

She did not do so, but said with great gentleness,

"You do me good, Anna."

The sick child having joyously closed her eyes opened them again and made her a sign to move away, signifying there was danger in proximity.

"I had to beg hard before I could persuade them to leave me outside in the rain. But I am happy, so happy."

"Because of what I just said?"

"Above all, because of what you said before; as happy as a queen."

"As happy as a queen?"

"Darling Mademoiselle Davidée," the child murmured as Davidée moved away.

Over the hedge the teacher's eyes sought the child's face and saw that it was radiant, and that her lips still murmured:

"Darling, darling."

She preserved those words in her heart, and many thoughts sprang from them.

Davidée came again on the 2nd of May, a Sunday. The bells of Ardésie had finished ringing for vespers. The sun was blazing. Anna, lying curled up on the two chairs, had lost her colour and her bright glance. As the assistant arrived Phrosine, possibly having heard her steps, opened the house door. Her hard

face as she leant out assumed a hostile expression. She made a movement to drive Davidée away, and it seemed as though she intended to snatch the child up and take her indoors. Anna, who could not turn round, and had no strength to cry out, saw in her friend's eyes that her mother was there, and that once driven away Davidée would not return. She raised her arm over her head and with her hand, which looked like an ivory sceptre, she waved to her mother to go away, seeming to say :

“Leave me my last joy, go back.”

And Phrosine never opened her lips ; she obeyed the child's commanding gesture. But her face did not lose the expression of anger and contempt, which she hoped Davidée would remember.

Anna understood that the danger was passed, and that she would not be taken indoors against her will. Her eyelids drooped as she meditated. Davidée, afraid of tiring her, moved away a little, but the sick child motioned and made her a sign to come back. She put her two hands to her lips and seemed to throw her soul in a kiss, saying tenderly and prayerfully as though it were her last will.

“I give you mama ”

The young girl knelt down and clasped her in her arms, and this time she did not spring up again.

“Anna, I promise you ; I accept, I shall always love you.”

As she returned to her home, her soul felt empty, and crushed like a grape in the wine press. She noticed the vivid green of the trees, the tender blue of the sky, but without pleasure.

Near to the school she was enveloped in a balmy gust of wind laden with the scent of broom.

"Pass on," she murmured, "my child is dying, you have no power over real suffering, a heart must be semi-happy to feel your consolation."

Some men and women were coming out of church, working people, with strong, resolute, tranquil faces. They were the aristocracy of labour, families long established in the country. There came with them a group of Bretons who had remained faithful in the country where the belfries are not open to the wind. They had been assisting at Benediction. Some of them saluted as they passed, others looked at Davidée defiantly as being one of the people one does not meet at church. She understood, she had the gift of divining friendship and enmity. As she opened the door Mademoiselle Renée appeared on the threshold.

"Oh, I am very unhappy," said Davidée.

Blonde Mademoiselle Renée, who had not yet removed her best hat, answered absent-mindedly :

"Really?"

"We are going to lose little Anna Le Floch. I have seen her, she cannot live."

"I was expecting it."

"Doesn't it trouble you? Don't you feel the same grief as myself?"

"My poor Mademoiselle Davidée, what a state you are in, you are unreasonable. Come with me."

The headmistress, taking the young girl by the hand led her into the drawing-room, and made her sit down; she took herself the only armchair, which was always offered to the

inspector on his visits, two or three times in the year.

"You are really too tender hearted."

"But I tell you she is dying."

"In the first place, how can you be certain—she is very young. And then as a teacher of twenty or thirty children you must expect to lose one or two of them. People die at all ages."

She spoke in an amiable but unsympathetic voice. For all answer Davidée put her head on Renée's shoulder and burst into tears. The latter kissed her and smoothed her silky dark hair with an admiring caress.

"Don't cry, child, you will make yourself ill, and wear yourself out, and no one will be grateful to you for doing so. At your age one seeks amusement, not tears. Drive sad thoughts out of your head, let us talk of something else. Come, tell me about the beginning of your love-affair with Maleul Sobersides."

Davidée sprang up, and pushed the head-mistress away.

"What are you saying? I will not allow—you insult me. I am not in love with anyone, certainly not with that man. But if I had a secret to confide I swear to you——"

Renée Desforges had also risen.

"Continue, Mademoiselle, continue"

"I swear you would not be chosen to receive it."

The assistant had reached the door and opened it when she heard a peal of laughter behind her.

"You are unstrung, Mademoiselle I think you are about as absurd as it is possible to be. Look at me, if you please, I have the right to command here."

Davidée turned her head, and saw a pale face livid and distorted with fury, eyes burning with hatred, a woman dressed for visiting, shaking her fist, and stumbling over her words.

"It is finished," she blurted out, "I have been too indulgent, you think it is safe to treat me like this, well, you'll see. There will be a sequel to this, I promise you. For the present I warn you that your intimacy with that woman, Phrosine, is quite unseemly. Your virtue, Mademoiselle, needs some hints. You give moral lessons but you must also take them. You are compromising yourself. And you would do well not to hold conversations in the open with Maieul Jacquet, your temporary gardener, while he awaits promotion. You think I know nothing about it, I know everything. Be careful."

The assistant went up to her room without replying. She did not cry. She stood before the window, and her eyes wandered to the horizon while she thought over the events of the last few weeks, her blood at fever heat. Fear played no part in the emotion which made her tremble but which did not prevent her from being absolute mistress of herself. She was trying to fathom the motives which had prompted her actions, to remember the impulses of her soul, and the thoughts which had come to her upon each meeting with Maieul, Anna and Phrosine. She would have wished some disinterested person to assure her that she had not given way to excessive annoyance, perhaps to some secret and until then, unconscious antipathy, when she had turned upon Mademoiselle Renée. The headmistress's hostility was now declared.

She would be implacable. Nevertheless Davidée regretted nothing. After all her words and angry gesture were but a defence of her honour, though possibly she was too sensitive. She would not yield whatever it cost, she would stand alone, and maintain her right to act as she thought fit outside of the school, as she had done up to the present. In this moral and physical crisis the thought of Anna le Floch became her chief support.

At nightfall the children often went from one village to another in little groups. Sundays above all, if they had spent the day with a friend, they never failed to return home for supper. Davidée went downstairs and sat on a stone a few yards from the school gate. The evening was clear and cold. The wind which during the day had a pleasant spring warmth, had turned cold, making the last straggling pedestrians shiver. It brought with it a smell of newly turned earth, and young grass, but the perfume of the brook had disappeared. The young girl wrapped herself in the cape she had thrown over her shoulders. She raised her head; her face was dull and dazed, the face of one who has come through a mental struggle, and though the anguish has passed, can find no consolation and no strength. She gazed towards the west where the sky was lowering, and thought of Anna. She was like a mother prevented from going to her child, seeing her everywhere. A few stars began to twinkle between two meagre willow trees facing the school. There was a curious clacking noise now distant, now near, behind the old houses over the hills down in the road, a noise difficult to locate, which suddenly

ceased and as suddenly recommenced, and which might have been made by the turning of a mill wheel. But this was not the country of mills ; it is in the Charentes district that the water mills chant their song, away in the plain where, by numerous little canals and rivulets the sea throws up its seaweed, which is finally restored to its bosom. There in the great white house too big for her, a woman who had spent the week in arranging, dusting, and polishing, sat waiting for bedtime and sleep, when she might forget her only daughter, the daughter who sat there by the wayside in Ardésie, sighing as she used to do in her childhood after a storm of tears.

Three little girls were coming down from the hills, their sabots clacked against the road, they hesitated to advance and stood between the school wall and the ill-kept hedge, afraid of the motionless figure sitting there with something white over its head.

"Louise Testour? Lucienne Gorget? Jeannie Fete-Dieu?" said a voice they knew, so gently that not a bird in the hedge was startled.

Fear took to itself wings, and the children rushed onward as at mid-day. They clung round their mistress as she sat there. Louise had a hat decorated with an ostrich plume stolen from a hen turkey, Lucienne a felt toque with a wreath of flowers, and Jeannie was bareheaded. They were so delighted to find a friend in the deserted path which they had hesitated to take, that it was a bitter disappointment to them to find that the mistress had been crying. To weep, when one has the right to command, when there are no lessons to study, what could be the matter? The question could be asked with the eyes only, and

that is not easy at night, even when bending down, very close.

"Anna le Floch, your little companion, is very ill, children."

They understood then why their teacher was crying and they too were grieved, but not nearly as much as she was.

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

"I fear you will never see her again."

There was a half sob from one of the listening children, but it was impossible to say which of them felt the news most, as all three had their heads hanging low, their chins resting on their breasts.

Davidée was tempted to say,

"Pray for her."

She dared not, she would not pronounce such a phrase before her pupils, nor elsewhere, not even to her own heart. If the thought had crossed her mind, it was only because the sick child herself had spoken of prayer.

"You love her very much, don't you?" she asked.

The three heads were raised, and sank back simultaneously.

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

"Think of her, won't you?"

One of them understood what the mistress probably meant. Jeannie Fete-Dieu, whose round eyes gleamed like those of a dear little grey owl, alone answered, and very seriously,

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

Davidée very gently pushed Louise and Lucienne aside and drew Jeannie to her.

"Lean down, closer still, the others must not hear. I want to send a message by you, but you must not tell anyone who gave it to you."

"No, Mademoiselle."

"Do you promise?"

"Yes."

"Listen, then."

Davidée whispered something to the child, who made a sign that she understood. She was so delighted at the honour that her grief for Anna was forgotten.

"Now run home, children," said the mistress, speaking to all three. "I will listen to the noise of your sabots until you have turned the corner. But now I think of it, how were you able to leave your grandmother so long, Jeannie?"

"Someone is taking care of her, otherwise, you understand——"

"Who, then?"

"A man," said the child, laughing, "a neighbour, Monsieur Maieul. For the last week," she hastily added, "he has scarcely left the hill—we have never seen so much of him before. He spends all his evenings up there, and he promised the Bretons—you know the Bretons of La Gravelle—that he would go down twice to see how grandmama was getting on while they and I were absent. It is very good of him."

The three children moved away with the same clacking sound as had heralded their approach. The young girl leant her head against the wall, and realised that a new joy was born in her heart—a joy such as a mother feels when her child quickens. Was it possible? Was this a result of her courageous little effort to shake off apathy, to speak as a virgin of purity, to pronounce the words of eternal law—had she not said something of the kind in her trouble, not realising quite what she meant? And here were

wrecked souls raising themselves once more and obeying the summons—one at least was obeying. What a combat against oneself. What power had helped them? What mysterious force was at work that the word of a young girl, the plaint of a child, should conquer even once or for a time, passion, habit, and the pity which mingles weeping with our love? It could not be explained—it was beautiful. This, then, was the reason of Anna Le Floch's singular expression of joy, her almost ecstatic looks. The child had said nothing. Who had planted such delicacy in that soul, which might have been perverted and grown gross and indifferent, considering hereditary tendencies, and the lack of culture, and the example and conversations and want of reserve to which it had been exposed? What merciful power had listened to the prayers of the sick, poverty-stricken child? Was there a loving force watching over the world, listening to wretched souls, seconding the most trifling movement of charity or repentance, of doubt, or desire of purification, or of simple lassitude of wickedness? Davidée pondered over these questions. Her soul was penetrated by the problem of our hidden destiny. She felt that night that the measure of hope necessary to carry each one of us through life had been mysteriously born in her.

The stars were high above the willow trees.

"He spends all his nights on the hill now."

Davidée looked out to La Gravelle

She went in. Mademoiselle Renée had left the lamp alight for her, and a little soup in the yellow soup-tureen, which was standing close to the still warm embers.

CHAPTER V

ANNA'S FUNERAL

ON the 3rd, 4th and 5th of May the news from the house of the Plains was very bad. On the 6th Mademoiselle Birot distributed books from the school library. Several pupils and a few girls who had left school came at eleven, it being the first Thursday of the month. They brought back their volumes and asked for new ones. Davidée was standing before the varnished pine bookcase, which contained two hundred books, bound in cloth. She had read most of the books, and knew what to hand to each pupil as they came up usually with the remark.

"I want a novel, something funny."

She was tired of the phrase. The big girls walked away reading, the little ones ran off with their books under their arms or in their pockets. She was about to shut the bookcase and go back when Ursula Morin came in. Ursula was a slight, indolent, secretive girl ready to laugh delightedly at the most trifling compliment. To-day she was sad.

"What! is it you, Ursula? Are you taking to reading? What shall I give you? A fashion journal?"

Davidée spoke before seeing Ursula's face, which bore the traces of tears, and which she

was as usual holding on one side like a restive kid.

"What is it?" asked Davidée suddenly. "Is Anna Le Floch worse?"

Ursula, with tight shut lips, bent her head.

"Very bad?"

The child again bent her head.

"Is she dying? I want to see her again. I will go."

"No, Mademoiselle, there is no use. It is too sad. She is dead."

The long cruel afternoon came to an end. How an unshared grief makes a day drag. Mademoiselle Renée, on hearing the news—did she learn it from her assistant?—immediately thought of the funeral.

"Well, it was expected, Mademoiselle; it cannot be helped. It is a relief for the mother."

"Say rather a remorse, a terrible blow, which will change everything"

"How little you know them, well, never mind. I leave it to you to superintend the pupils on the day of the funeral. Please see that the children of the first class put on white frocks; that is, those who have them. I have an attack of neuralgia and cannot go out, but in any case it would be unseemly for either of us, you understand, to go to Phrosine's house. If you are going into town——"

"I cannot say. I have made no plans."

"I simply said if you go into town you had better order a wreath. My children will subscribe towards it, and I suppose yours will do the same. Something fitting, nothing exaggerated, eh?"

Davidée made no answer. As soon as school

was over she went out, ostentatiously turning towards the village of Malaquais to show that she was not going to Phrosine's. She was haunted by the thought of Anna ; the child was more present to her mind than the landscape or the men and women working in their gardens, washing linen in the ponds or walking along the same road as herself. The child had disappeared from sight. But was it possible that she was annihilated ? To die before maturity, having lived, one might say, an hour. What 'an injustice, unless there were some compensation now and for ever, certain and eternal. How a short unhappy life proclaims a life hereafter. The thoughts which surged through Davidée's mind were not altogether cruel ; she experienced a consoling conviction in the depth of her soul from which sprang words to which the young girl listened without being conscious of any effort of will or of personal action.

" My days were not labour lost ; suffering is over ; it was fruitful. I was placed in proximity to souls in peril, my mother's, yours, perhaps others' The whole explanation of my life lay in its purity. I had a mysterious love for the law I scarcely knew ; I suffered for that love. I was sacrificed for it, and because of it I was victorious. Victorious for myself and perhaps for the woman who formed my body, and whose soul I have perhaps saved if you so desire it, my mistress, and if she desires it. I give you mama. Do not look at her as others do, through her sin, but through my sufferings. Try to raise her, she weeps to-day. Mademoiselle Davidée, finish the work I could only

begin. Do not be repelled, do not be discouraged."

On the outskirts of the town she got off the tram and went into a shop where funeral wreaths were sold. A fat punctilious man smelling of wine came forward.

"If you will look at our latest novelties, Madame, you will, I think, be satisfied."

He stood behind the counter between two cupboards, the shelves of which were laden with crowns of beads and of artificial flowers, zinc medallions, crosses and slabs of marble bearing inscriptions.

"It is for a little girl," she said.

"What age? Age is an important point. Now this year for new-born infants we have sold more——"

"Please make a large wreath of white flowers," said Davidée, "with a bow of ribbon with the name of the school. A large one, there will be no other, the mother is poor."

She paid in advance, and went on her way into the town.

Two days later the assistant teacher escorted some forty little girls towards the house of the Plains. She had no more than forty with her at first, but at each crossroad, at a field gate, at a half open house door, soon thrown wide open, some little girl dressed in white, black and white, or blue, would join the ranks of the procession. For fear of a scandal the two mistresses had decided not to go as far as the house, which was also one of the furthest from Ardésie. It would have been embarrassing to meet Maieul there receiving the guests, giving orders as though he were the master. A woman

had gone round the neighbouring villages on the previous day, showing a square of paper on which was written in a large round hand .

“ My child's funeral will take place to-morrow, Saturday, at ten o'clock You are requested to attend.—P. Le Floch.”

Who would comply with the request ? What sympathy or pity would there be for the woman who was never seen outside of the house or the school ? As they reached the second cross-road the children lined up against the wall which gave a little shade, and Davidée, being nearest to the Le Floch's house, heard the muffled sound of the chorister chant echo over the burning country Then she perceived round a bend of the road a metal cross borne by an acolyte flash in the sun, and behind the chorister appeared the priest, followed by a black horse drawing the hearse There was no pall, no fringes, no initial, but hearse and coffin were covered with an unusual decoration.

“ What is it ? ” whispered all the little girls, bending forward in the blazing sun. “ What have they covered her with ? How it shines and flashes, falling on all sides, how pretty. When they come closer we shall see what it is ”

The carriage came along slowly. Between the verses of the psalm the noise of wheels could be heard. And then Anna's flowered pall could be seen. The hearse and coffin were completely hidden by the most beautiful sheaves of broom, better than any wreath to be bought in shops, more radiant than that which hung behind, tied with white ribbon. The little dead girl was covered with the pall of Spring Someone must have spent an entire day gathering sprigs

in perfect bloom. Someone must have bribed the men of death to leave the golden broom around the child who had so loved it.

Behind the hearse walked a woman thickly veiled, leaning on the arm of another woman, a neighbour. With them was a man of about forty-five, a former friend of the child's father, carrying his silk hat. These were the only mourners. The children walked in twos behind them. They were not thinking of the companion who had laughed and played and studied with them. Grief lasts but a minute at their age. They never spoke of Anna, but whispered to one another the names of the men who stood up as they went by, raised their caps, or of the women they saw at the windows, some of whom, not all, crossed themselves.

"There are the bells," they said again, "we have been seen from the belfry."

They made appointments for the next day, which was Sunday. The sheaves of broom swayed with the movement of the hearse. A flight of martins circled round the church. And Davidée, the last of the cortège, saw the cortège winding ahead, and murmured :

"To-morrow only her mother and I will remember her."

She approved of the discretion which had kept Maieul away.

"How powerful death is, that it keeps within bounds an affection which has no right to be openly avowed. I thank you, Monsieur Maieul, for the little child who can no longer do so."

It was the first time that the assistant mistress had attended a pupil's funeral. She had brought with her the only pious book she

possessed, the little morocco missal. She opened the book in church, and some of the pupils nudged one another, and laughingly called attention to their mistress reading the Mass.

Davidée was not reading, however, but she let her eyes fall now and again on the text. A few words and a few phrases of the service carried her mind to the child whom she could so plainly see, and who had for the last time collected her companions round her, a little restless but less noisy than usual. Which of them prayed? They were young, little used to meditation. Perhaps one or two had recited an Ave Maria at the beginning of Mass.

Phrosine, sitting in the front row on the right, was so unfamiliar with the ceremony that her neighbour had to tell her when to kneel, rise or sit. The father's friend was probably waiting for Mass to end, in a neighbouring tavern. Davidée, touched by this neglect of the dead, felt that she was the only beseeching friend, and associated herself heart and soul with the ideas, beautiful they seemed to her, which she found in the unfamiliar prayerbook. Was it a prayer? Whom was she addressing? It was the cry of extreme pity, of great friendship, which could find no human means of expression, and which passed beyond human kind.

"Deliver her not into the hands of the enemy, nor forget her unto the end, but command her to be received by the holy Angels . . ! Brethren, we will not have you ignorant concerning them that are asleep, that you be not sorrowful even as others who have no hope. For the Lord Himself shall come down from heaven with commandment . . . the dead

who are in Christ shall rise first—I am the Resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me although he be dead shall live! . . . Let eternal light shine upon her.” With the most grandiose words ever uttered on earth, the remembrance of a child ascended to heaven, as the name Anna—Anna—recurred at intervals in the prayers.

When Mass was over, the humble procession reformed; it had but a few yards to go. The cemetery of Ardésie was a long field where, amidst thistles, mosses and broom, great green oaks rose to heaven, taking the place of yews. Their leaves spread from the ground in thick layers heavenwards, the sky filtering through the top branches. They formed just such a wood as we see on the southern hills of Provence. Crosses were scattered among them, half covered at this season of the year by red fumitory and buttercups. There were pathways among the grass, and places where people had knelt.

Here little Anna was laid to rest. The chanter and priest intoned a last psalm, the mother uttered a savage cry and fell weeping on her friend’s shoulder, who took her away quickly, murmuring .

“Poor thing, poor thing.”

“I wish it fell to my lot to console her,” thought Davidée.

She superintended the long file of pupils who with serious faces passed one after the other before the open grave and sprinkled it and the coffin with holy water. They returned home in the same order, the little ones in front. The sound of steel shaping the slates was borne at intervals on the soft air, as on ordinary days.

Davidée was overcome with grief ; she felt that her soul was held by the child whose body was about to be lowered into the earth, and having given the signal to leave, she turned again for a last look at the white covered coffin, the green oaks, and trodden grass. At that moment the priest came carrying his surplice on his arm. She had never spoken to him. They sometimes passed each other in the streets and bowed, she with a stiff abrupt bow, plainly showing that she saluted an adversary of popular enlightenment, and he could not entirely disguise the displeasure he felt at meeting one of the women who were teaching the children, his children of Ardésie, without believing in the soul, with the desire, he presumed, of turning them from salvation. He could not meet Renée or Davidée without thinking of the poverty which prevented him from opening a free school, and the sight of them brought regret, envy, and suffering. And as he had never exchanged a word with either of them, both came under his displeasure. He was a man beginning to show signs of age, tall, extremely thin, with red hair and eyebrows, a face ravaged by a grief born of living in perpetual friction, lips pale and chapped, used to silence and hard bread, and eyes of extraordinary limpidity. Under the shadow of heavy lids were blue eyes, which he always distrusted, a child's eyes for sincerity, a man's for gravity, eyes that would wish that the world was beautiful, and only rested on things and human beings with caution and briefly. When he spoke of God, the charm which fidelity to faith adds to the most ungracious face, shone unmistakably in his. Mademoiselle Birot had never noticed

anything beyond the shabby cassock and embarrassed bow, but it seemed to her to-day that to pass without a word to the priest who had blessed Anna's grave and had hastened on Sunday night to the house in the Plains, would be grossly ill-bred.

"I thank you, Monsieur," she said.

He started at the unknown and unexpected voice.

"For administering the sacraments to that little girl? But it is for me to thank you, Mademoiselle. You sent me word by Jéannie Fete-Dieu, it was well done, even admirable, positively admirable."

"I knew it was what the child desired, and I loved her."

"A martyr, Mademoiselle, there are some one does not look upon as such, but their souls fly straight to heaven."

Davidée looked at the Abbé, and the Abbé at Davidée, and each noticed a tear on the other's lashes. The young girl was touched.

"Can you not do anything for the mother?" she asked abruptly, anxious to catch up the children.

"Humanly speaking, nothing. She only received me on Sunday because of her child. But I will pray for her to-morrow at Mass. It's admirable, positively."

Davidée, in spite of her grief, was tempted to laugh, but at the same time she perceived in the priest's face, like the beautiful light of a summer day, the reflection of radiant thought which kept the soul ever blossoming and pulsating.

She bowed and walked away quickly, her book under her arm; the pupils had passed

the last houses round the church, and a carriage might suddenly turn a bend in the road.

All the afternoon Davidée's thoughts passed from Anna to Phrosine, from the latter to Maieul Jacquet. What would become of the woman? how could she live now, if she had really broken with Maieul? not on the meagre sum voted by the Municipal Council, "for the sweeping of the classrooms and school quarters."

The young girl felt very inexperienced to fill the rôle of counsellor she had adopted; she felt that the promptings of poverty would be more effective than her advice, and that as the memory of the child faded, the evil life with one man or another would recommence.

How could the woman gain two francs a day, or even a franc and a half? It was a serious problem. Washing linen in the streams? Phrosine would not accept such arduous labour. Sewing for busy farmers' wives? Needlewomen were not lacking in Ardésie, and each one had her clientèle; you had to begin young, apprenticed to some woman well established and enjoying the confidence of the villagers. Work, too, was slack just then. What was to be done? Find work at some of the big factories? What a life for a woman with such a past, and who was very far from being ugly. These and other ideas surged through the head of the assistant teacher, who did not leave the school till evening, having exercises to correct and the weekly classes to prepare though the limpid day was very inviting. Hills and roofs were shining, the church spire was surrounded by a halo of light. It was impossible to tell from whence the wind blew, each weathercock being of a different opinion.

At twilight the peace of the day became intensified.

In the garden of the presbytery, almost uncultivated, as earth was lacking and clay abounded, the Abbé was finishing his office. He was sitting under a wild vine, which had small leaves and huge branches. His thumb marked the place in the book where he would presently resume the interrupted lesson. Over the old moss-grown pear trees and grass-grown wall, his eyes drank in the beautiful light shining over his Ardésie. Occupied with anxious thoughts for the welfare of his mediocre flock, he sighed as he lowered his eyes to the chimneypots and tops of cherry trees which reminded him of a certain house and its tenants.

"My God," he murmured, "I am too sad, I worry myself unnecessarily, I make things blacker than they are. In our complaints of man's wickedness we forget in our anticipations that You are God, and You are there, and that You love us, that You are everywhere, and consequently that Hope is everywhere. You have brought this home to me. The child You have called to Yourself was a kind of dove, a saint with a splendid horror of impurity. Who would have thought it? She had no weapon against life, but Your penetrating grace is admirably skilful. And is it not admirable, too, that that secular teacher should have been inspired to send for me? You will count that to her credit. Guide her soul. Support my own poor soul, too sensitive to the wideness of evil, to its heavy blindness. These thoughts would rob me of charity, if You did not renew it every minute. I do not complain. I will not do so again. The

bell that rings to us has passed through fire. I, too, shall sing some day I must teach my mind not to yield to depression. The first remedy against material misery is the development of the Supernatural. There are still enough seeds of Paradise remaining wherewith to sow a field. All my parish, the whole of France, have I not consolations? That old woman Fete-Dieu, worn sample of the eternal Gospel. The evening is balmy; Nature is like men, at times in sin, at times in grace. The child's soft slumber covers the world. Deliverance, deliverance, the wind, that messenger's work is done; sounds of life come not only from north and west, but from all sides, life returning home. The air is sweet. The day dies well. Magnificat."

CHAPTER VI

A CONVERSATION WITH PHROSINE

ON the morrow of the funeral, Phrosine came to the school as usual for her daily work ; she had left off her mourning and was wearing her ordinary grey dress. Davidée saw her enter the classrooms, and leave soon after. She was touched by the pallor and rough grief of her face. The pupils moved away without their usual greeting, frightened by the look of suffering which they mistook for anger. Davidée was thinking all during school time of that face, and calling herself a coward for not offering sympathy to the grief unheeded by others. The pupils had dispersed and she was unnerved. As she came out of the class for the short recreation which divided the morning's work, she saw Renée coming towards her surrounded by a buzzing group of children.

"Your friend, Madame Phrosine, wants to speak to you, Mademoiselle."

The children, though not fully understanding, tittered at the tone in which the headmistress said the words, "Your friend."

"She is at the bottom of the garden, go to her, till I take the recreation."

The assistant walked across the court, opened the garden gate and saw on a bench at the end

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of the alley, the childless mother, the woman abandoned by Maieul. Davidée grew pale and tried to disguise the fact that she was trembling, for Phrosine was looking at her, leaning on her elbows, her chin in her hands; and in her fixed glance there was a sort of mad grief, mingled with hatred, which wounded the young girl's heart. Davidée reached her and sat down on the bench, while Phrosine's eyes never for a moment left her face.

"You want to speak to me, Phrosine?"

"Yes, to tell you that I hate you, and your bigotry. And that you have done me so much injury that I ought——"

"What?"

"To set your house on fire."

"I have no house."

"The school then, if you think I could not find three resolute lads to help me. But I am not thinking of men just now, but of grief. I detest you, do you hear?"

"Repeat it if it does you good; it suffices for me to know that I have not deserved your abuse, Phrosine."

"In the first place, don't call me Phrosine. I am no longer the sweeper of your classrooms; that's done with. All's over between us. I am Madame Le Floch, deserted by her husband and deserted by her lover, through your fault. Above all I am a mother from whom you stole her child's love, her child's joy, her child's life."

"I?"

"You, no other. Say, it's all very well for priests to condemn and despise women who have lovers. They have their Gospel, their God, and their prayers, but you, why should you mind?"

Where do you find that one is not mistress of one's own body, as you say?"

"In the law."

"Which? The law you make and unmake. I know lawmakers, I do. They make short work of their laws, when they get in their way. You, and all others like you, and perhaps even the headmistress too, are nothing but hypocrites. You had no right to sit in judgment on me, yet you taught my child to judge me."

"No, her own instinct taught her that."

"But you encouraged her, you, Mademoiselle Birot, and she is dead, dead, and long before her death, when I kissed her, I only held her body in my arms. I hate you for all the empty kisses she gave me, for all the tears she left on my face. Without your lessons, Anna would be alive."

"Alas, there were other reasons for her death."

"What reasons?"

"The blood she had received. But if I have been able to make her soul more pure, I do not regret it, even though she suffered, even though you reproach me. I wish all my pupils were like her."

"You see, you did encourage her. Besides, you told me in my own house that I was wrong. You must change, you secular teacher, otherwise——"

"Otherwise?"

"There are lads who have no fear, they will speak to your chiefs, and you'll get the sack."

She spoke in a low evil voice, her eyes fixed on the yard from where came the laughter of Anna's living companions. Her heart was swelling with unshed tears; she restrained her

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sobs, but the effort sent a shiver through her, and now and again she moved her head brusquely shaking back her glowing hair, which had come partially undone.

Davidée spoke as little as possible, for fear of showing indignation. She felt that Phrosine's anger and threats were born not only of grief but of rebellion against existing things, and also of moral wretchedness. From a distance the two women seemed to be talking calmly, one bent and weary, the other sitting upright in the clear light of the morning; so thought Renée who could see them. Davidée by some mysterious generosity was moved to pity by the woman's threats.

"Madame Le Floch," she said, bending down, "since you object to my saying Phrosine; I am a poor girl to set herself up to teach others. I don't know everything; I doubt many things, what I teach is perhaps Christian teaching, though I am not a Christian, but I am very sure there is no happiness in disorder and that is why I spoke. I loved your child, I guessed the cause of her suffering. I did not sow the suffering which undermined her, but no one will persuade me that she was wrong. Perhaps I shall be driven away, but I shall never disown my little friend, who was grieved because her mother had a lover."

"Will you provide me with the means of living?" asked Phrosine abruptly.

"I wish I could, I would prefer to share with you."

The green eyes turned upon Davidée with a wide stare. An ignoble spirit, suspicious of good, confident of itself alone, shone out of them.

"Greenhorn, I am not one of those who will meekly follow you. Don't try to do me good. Be content with having stuffed the child with your doctrine. I am hard-hearted, I don't believe in words, and I did not come to beg. But I have yet something else to tell you. You have succeeded in separating Maieul and me. You think it a grand victory, I suppose?"

"For him, perhaps."

"He still loves me, don't make any mistake about it. It was he who left me, I don't deny that. I let him go, because of the child who was very ill. He never would have left me otherwise, I was part of him."

"I do not ask you to tell me your secrets."

"But I want to tell them. Even now I have but to make a sign. Some day if I return——"

"Are you leaving?"

"If I return, and if I want him, I shan't have to make a sign. I shall only have to look at him from one side of La Grenadière to the other. He will come to heel like a dog at his master's call."

"Why do you tell me this?"

"To warn you."

"I have no need of warning."

"I know what I am talking about. You won't hear me spoken of after a while. Perhaps never again. My daughter is dead, I want my son. I shall tramp till I find Le Floch, and he shall tell me what he has done with Maurice."

"How will you live?"

"I shall always be able to earn a few pence by sweeping another place like this, I suppose. It's a relief for you to get rid of a woman of my sort. I am going to look for my first child,

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whom his father stole from me. Good-bye, Mademoiselle."

She stood up and Davidée took her hand.

"You have not succeeded in wounding me. Tell me where you are going?"

"Straight ahead."

But she did not draw her hand away. In the distance the pupils were taking their ranks to return to class.

"Have you at least, Madame Le Floch, any reason for supposing that your husband is alive and is at work in some place or other?"

"I heard something of him from the man who was at my girl's funeral."

"Have you any money to get to him? Is it far?"

"I can work."

"But you will know no one. When do you leave?"

She did not answer.

"I want to see you again. When do you leave?"

"To-morrow morning, early."

She left the assistant and moved towards the school. Davidée followed and went into her class, whilst the servant, in her livery of poverty, with no head-dress but the sun's golden rays, opened the gate and passed out.

From the Green Note-Book.—"I have had a hard day. I wanted to be free to think over what I said to Phrosine this morning, to decide what I must do. The morning dragged on with the boredom of hearing lessons, the noise of talking, to which I had to put a stop. I was obliged to punish several of the children. From some of their answers I gathered that their parents take

no trouble with them, that I am alone so far as the training of them goes, and that I have to face undisciplined minds and strong and unchecked instincts. I spoke of this to Mademoiselle Renée, who mocked me. How coarse some natures are. What evil feelings are rooted in the souls of these children. And if I scold I do not touch the root, they fear me, that is all. My words have no power. They strike against mournful indifference or against an irony and defiance which seems to be born in them, and it is like Phrosine's laugh. Some of them, it is true, are affectionate. They hang round me after class and on returning to school in the afternoon. Alas, what will their affection for me be worth in ten years, or even in two? And though I were to succeed in really winning their love, what have I given them to make them better women? Like others I have dreamt of surviving in my pupils. I used to say to myself formerly 'My thoughts, my strength, my judgment will live anonymously but beneficially in the minds of those women and mothers.' What thought? What strength? And what authority will Davidée Birot's judgment have if self-interest points in another direction or if passion sways them?

"It is late. I find it difficult, weary as I am with emotion, with tramping, with attending to this, that and the other, to concentrate my thoughts dispersed over all the hours of this day. The voices of the children are almost as loud here as I sit alone in my room late at night as the voice of Phrosine when she spoke to me this morning. Phrosine is going away. What did she mean by boasting that she had a power over

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Maieul which no one could defeat? "I should only have to look at him from one side of La Grenadière to the other and he would come to heel as a dog at his master's call." Why did she say that to me? I suppose that gossiping has been going on, and that my name has been mixed in some lying tale. How degrading such talk is. I must see Phrosine again, however. What do her threats matter? I must not let her go away without giving her some proof of my interest. She is even more alone than I since she has been deserted. I have still twenty francs in my drawer from my month's salary. I will give them to her. I will beg from mama. To-morrow, at what hour? I will leave my shutters open then daylight will awaken me."

CHAPTER VII

THE FLIGHT AT DAWN

DAVIDÉE was up and out of doors at dawn. The air was pure and fresh, and nothing stirred on the hills or in the roadway. The only sign of man's industry was where towards Trélazé an exhaust pipe at the head of the mine sent up at regular intervals a volley of white steam. The fields were reposing, their grass heavy with dew and sleep. Davidée walked quickly. Would she meet Phrosine? She looked neither to right nor left, her heart was heavy; she was repeating to herself that Phrosine was leaving alone, with no one to help her, leaving the house where Anna had lived, with no definite plans. Had she told any of her neighbours? perhaps some of them were at this moment helping her to tie up her bundle and close the house. Davidée came in sight of the long roof and live hedge; the market gardeners had not yet begun work; a sparrow was twittering on the roof; no fire had been lit at Phrosine's this morning. An immense silence surrounded the house. The morning mist was lifting, the sky becoming blue. It was nearly sunrise. The stillness was broken by the neighing of a horse turned loose in the meadows, and the sound of shutters thrown back against some wall. Davidée pushed

open the gate, but stopped before she had gone three steps up the path. Phrosine was coming out, closing the door behind, and turning the key in the lock. She drew the key very slowly from the lock, breaking her last link with the poor house, and stood looking at the worn, discoloured door, perhaps seeing through it as she waited there motionless. At last she moved away, holding her key in her right hand and in her left a wicker basket, so full that the lid would not close. The basket contained all her worldly goods, clothes, provisions, a pair of shoes, keepsakes of her child. As she caught sight of the assistant teacher the sadness in her face changed to a hard look. She came forward casting a glance over the adjoining estate, where there was still no sign of life.

"Make no noise," she said, "I have told no one. The landlord can sell what he likes. I have nothing to pay him with. I will write and tell him to have patience."

She was wearing her black dress, fastened at the neck with a gold brooch, her wedding brooch. She had always walked through Ardésie bare-headed, and bare-headed she was still. She knew that her hair was beautiful in the beautiful morning light. Davidée could not help admiring her.

"How handsome she looks like that," she murmured; "and how young! What a pity it is."

"I will go part of the way with you. Let me help with the basket," she said aloud.

She took the handle of the basket on the right of Phrosine, and carrying it between them, the two women set out. They turned towards the town. The houses they passed were de-

tached, standing in their own grounds, very old, and some of them very beautiful, with sharp gables and mullion windows. Phrosine turned her head away, so as not to be recognised by the farmers' wives who tenanted them. The road curved, skirting round orchards.

"Are you sure you will find your husband?" asked Davidée.

"No."

"And your son?"

"Neither, but I want to find them. If I have to travel round France calling at every house where there is a boy of fourteen, I shall find my son."

"But you will not recognise him."

"He was like me. Do I look like everybody else?"

"You are going to the station, but to-night where will you be?"

Phrosine walked on a little without replying. She heard the sounds of wheels behind her. A woman passed in a cart laden with milk cans.

"Shall I give you and your companion a lift, Mother le Floch?"

"No thanks," replied Phrosine, "I have not far to go."

She turned to Davidée and began speaking volubly.

"Two years ago he fetched the child from the public refuge in Paris. He went for that purpose and he can't deny it, because the authorities wrote to M. Maine, whom you saw at my child's funeral, to ask particulars about him and me. My husband was then at Orléans or not far from it. I will take a ticket

for Orléans and then start searching for him. Don't speak of this to anyone."

"I promise you, Madame le Floch."

The woman shrugged her shoulders.

"Call me Phrosine for the short time that's left."

They had reached that point in their uphill walk where the wind from the opposite hills fans the traveller's forehead. As they felt the fresh wind from the slope, which is open to the Loire, blow over the immense valley, and travel from thence over the universe, the two women were seized with sudden weakness, and put the basket down in the dust.

"Oh," cried Davidée, "we are no longer in Ardèche."

"The wind is no longer scented with broom; it is over. This morning I am travelling further than I have ever been," said Phrosine.

She turned her hard, resolute eyes towards the valley she could no longer see.

"Come on," she said, "we mustn't get soft. I think it is the land in the basket which makes it weigh so heavy. My arm is like a piece of wool. If I could only leave everything behind."

"All the bad past."

"All the misery."

"Not all your sadness; take it with you, Phrosine, as a protection. See, the sun is already high."

The corner tile of a house on the road below looked like a new-blown rose. The two women bent down to resume their burden, and set off, balancing it between them. They walked on for several hundred yards, and reached the rusty gate of a red castle which used to keep watch

over the valley. They stopped and turned again simultaneously, looking to the left, from whence came the wind and the light. Beneath their feet was a last height of the slate vein which penetrates to the depths of the earth; before their eyes stretched a neglected hill, sparsely covered with grass, already burnt by the sun, which sloped down to the plain. A line of poplars rose at the bottom of the hill, showing that their roots were nourished by the neighbouring river. Further on, one could guess that the soil sloped still lower, and that hidden by the haze were white houses, roads, meadows, trees lining the fields, forests, gardens, clumps of sharp-pointed grasses. Great spaces blotted out by the mist stretched to the hills, which embrace the Loire until it is lost on the blue horizon.

Doubtless the two women felt the same emotion as they breathed the morning air, and their eyes wandered over the wide expanse of country to the valley, whence the river flows from the other end of France. They saw in the distance the solitary mountain of Saint Saturnin, and the wooded banks which slope down from it, and which hung like blue smoke over the shining mist.

"Orléans is over there?" enquired Phrosine.

Davidée nodded.

"If I could only find my son."

"Yes, if you only could," said Davidée fervently.

"And take him away from my man. I don't want him to have the boy, and to say that I shall never see Maurice again, if he does not make it possible for me to do so."

She spoke with an anger nourished in solitude for many years, ready to explode at any moment. She looked sometimes over the valley and sometimes at the houses on the roadside at the bottom of the sunburnt hill, and perhaps her mind, distraught by anger and thoughts of the future, saw nothing but the villages she would tramp through, an unknown mother seeking a faithless man and a son, perhaps dead, perhaps hidden. There were no witnesses to overhear, and their hearts spoke freely.

"Just think how wicked he must have been to take away my child, not yet three years old, to run away with him one evening when I came home late because the washing was particularly heavy, and I was pregnant."

"Had he ever threatened to go? Nothing—no scene?"

"No; if you are married you can't get along without scenes, but he never threatened to leave me. Only when I told him I was expecting another child, he said, 'Two kids, no thanks.' And when I returned tired out, I found the house, well, as it is now, and an empty grate waiting me."

"Coward!"

"They are all the same, some more, some less," said Phrosine, laughing aloud, showing sound teeth, and shaking her golden hair.

"I was a handsome girl, too, he courted me well, he spent money on our wedding as though I were a queen, but you'll find plenty of queens in the world whose reign has lasted only two years. I don't know why I am telling you all this. I feel as though we shall meet again, he and I, and that one of us will kill the other.

How I have cursed him ; he is the cause of all my troubles."

Davidée extended her hand towards the hills which border on the Loire.

"Who knows, Phrosine? He may have changed."

"Not he."

"If you were to find him unhappy? "

"As sure as I'm alive he is having a lark with some other woman."

"If he were to be touched at the sight of you? If you were to bring him back? "

"What are you thinking of? Bring him back? "

"Yes, you can try."

"My poor young lady, we should have to have fresher hearts than we have at present, for we hate each other."

"Even if you come back with the child alone it will be the saving of you. You can begin life again, helped by your child, helped a little by me if you will allow me. I am forbidden to see you, but all the same I will see you. You will not feel so desperate as you do now ; you will have friends around you."

Phrosine listened, the same painful mocking laugh on her weak lips. She was not used to pitying words ; she did not like them, she distrusted them. Was she being made a fool of? The valley was full of light, and the mist was rising over new villages.

"Come, Mademoiselle Davidée, don't play the innocent ; you have nothing to gain by bothering over me, on the contrary."

"I do not understand."

"Never mind, you would do better to look to yourself."

"I shall have the time, when you have left."

"——And your position, you are denounced."

"What about?"

"I warn you, you have been, I know."

"Well, I will defend myself."

"Look to that first, and then don't desire my return, it will be better for you if I don't."

"Why, Phrosine?"

The woman bent down and seized the handle of the basket, and as she drew herself up and began walking, looking before her towards the houses on the outskirts of the town, she said:

"I am not worth much. Don't trust me. I am not your sort. If I were to come back you would regret having known me. Let's talk of something else. Here is the high road."

There was no answer for a minute.

"You don't like me," said Davidée, "I am convinced of that now. But if you have need of me, let me know all the same." Phrosine shrugged her shoulders. They had reached the high road running from Angers to Briare.

The tram rolled up, buzzing on the rails like a bumble-bee caught in a spider's web.

"Thank you for your help," said Phrosine, "I know you did it in memory of the little girl."

She stopped the tram, got on, and placing her basket on the platform at the back, leant over the rail.

"It will be better for you if I don't return. Good-bye," she cried.

There was a cloud of dust round the tram lines and yet Davidée could distinguish for a long way Phrosine's eyes full with the thought of Ardésie.

CHAPTER VIII

MAIEUL CATCHES A HARE

"DENOUNCED". the word, easily whispered, leaves the mind a prey to anxiety for a time. Nothing happened, however, to confirm Phrosine's warning. A period of overwhelming heat followed a week of cold rain and sleet. The heavens were stormy, the sky copper colour, tiring to the eye, giving out a broken dun-coloured light. The pulse of the earth seemed to vibrate; the flies were exultant, children ceased work; their mistresses yawned and kept awake with difficulty.

"If the Inspector comes on one of these exasperating afternoons," thought Davidée, "I am lost. He will get impatient and I will answer with tears, which to the authorities is the worst possible answer."

Mademoiselle Renée never spoke to her assistant, and her every movement and every look denoted unbroken irritation. The guard roamed round the pond of La Grenadière, where the young workmen in bands basked in a state of nature. Scandalmongering was prolonged between neighbours to a late hour, throughout the length and breadth of Ardésie. There was talk of a strike. Leaning on the rails of his terrace, Maieul Jacquet stood deep in thought.

He had no inclination to go down to the tavern. Not that he had never been known to turn in at the "Little Poland," or the "Père Pompette" on settling days, to join his comrades at the bar. But a certain aversion to unnecessary expense; an idea of saving a little money and buying a plot of ground was strong in this grandson of peasants. He had neither the walk nor the speech of a rustic; in appearance and gait he resembled a cavalryman, but the love of the soil survived, and so in this May weather, when electricity made men's blood reach fever heat, Maieul, instead of going down to the tavern, sat out on his stairs. Having no housekeeper, he could be seen sewing on buttons or patching his trousers, which he had learnt to do when on service, but found very difficult. Or else he would tie on fish hooks or arrange his nets, bending low, as he did not wish his neighbours to know that he would be spreading his nets during the nights of Ascension-tide. As every one knows, that is the time to fish. Sometimes a neighbour would call up to him, in the silent stifling nights.

"Is it cool up there, Monsieur Maieul?"

"Not very."

"You don't say much"

"Because I don't feel inclined."

The dialogue was soon discontinued. Women said of him:

"He doesn't waste words, he doesn't waste money; he would make a fine man if he chose, but he doesn't choose."

Nine o'clock, half-past nine, ten rang out. All round La Gravelle there were the sounds of deep yawns, voices talking, the light footsteps of

mothers and children, and in the sky the light lingered, seemingly loth to give way to darkness.

On Wednesday, eve of the Ascension, the women having called to Maieul as usual, received no answer. A little boy climbed the staircase bare-footed and gingerly peered round for fear of a slap from Maieul, who objected to spies. He came jumping down shouting :

"There is no one there, and the door is shut."

"He is probably spreading his nets, the night is soft," said the women.

But he was not more than one hundred yards away at the Fete-Dieu's house sitting on a slab of stone at the entrance, his head uncovered, partly on account of the heat and partly out of respect for the aged invalid whom he had helped out of doors, and who was sitting on a chair hung round with shawls. The little grey eyes of the invalid were fixed on the sky, where the stars were beginning faintly to appear. The eyes were smiling and in the evening light had regained that expression of happiness, curiosity and peace which are the attributes of youth. Three feet from her sat Jeannie on a low chair tipped back, her head against the wall, her legs dangling, her eyes wandering from Maieul to her grandmother ; from the three clumps of wall-flowers to the purring cat, but not often to the sky. In a few weeks she had grown taller and blossomed out ; she was more self-conscious, quick to blush, and yet more self-assured ; she had acquired a certain amount of coquetry, and was aware of a new power within her. Maieul paid no attention to her, and so the child assumed a fine air of indifference. He spoke at

intervals to the old woman, who was enjoying the unusual treat.

"This is the time to make the bees swarm," she said. "In my young days we used to watch for them in the heat of the day, and when they began to fly I was the first to run after them, my two hands in my sabots, which I clacked together over my head. It was a sight to see. At Ascension time the air is all movement, the water is all movement, and I may say the heart is all movement."

"One may say so," replied Maieul. "Even the animals have their way of celebrating our Saviour's ascension into heaven. Many a Christian might learn of them."

The good woman looked slyly at the quarryman, who laughed.

"And Monsieur Maieul will go and spread his nets in the pond of La Grenadière."

"No, mother Fete-Dieu."

"At Authion then? No? Then are you going as far as the Loire? Oh, it is many years ago that my dead husband used to go to the Belle Poule on the eve of the Ascension."

"You have not hit it. I am not taking out my nets just yet. I am going out with my gun."

At the same time he made a sign towards Jeannie, who was balancing herself on her chair.

"Little Jeannie, my pretty one, supposing you run up the hill and see if the neighbours have gone to bed?" said her grandmother.

The child rose with a sulky look and began to go up the path.

"You don't want me to hear what you are going to say. As if you suppose I don't guess."

"Run along, run along. Did you ever see

such a child? Really, Monsieur Maieul, if she knows what you are going to say it is more than I do."

"They are sharp when they are budding into maidenhood."

"She's no fool, that's sure. She is a good child, a little cheeky, but inoffensive. She was as simple as a lamb or a little chicken a few months ago, and here she is giving herself airs and graces. What did you wish to say to me?"

Maieul leant forward, and his light eyes became so grave and anxious that the old woman felt all her maternal instincts revive.

"Mother Fete-Dieu, I want to kill a hare to send to Mademoiselle Davidée Birot, the assistant teacher, but will she accept it when it is killed?"

"She will not accept it."

"Ah, you agree with me. You think her quite a lady?"

"Better still, Maieul Jacquet, a person of high principle. Then it is on her account you have come?"

"Yes."

"Poor boy"

She sighed and joined her hands over the shawl wrapped round her, as though she would calm her heart beating too rapidly. She was silent for many minutes, and the world was silent with her. The stars were listening, and Jeannie, standing among the broom, also listened.

"Maieul, it is a blessing all the same if you have broken with the other."

He made no reply, he seemed like a man awaiting sentence, mouth gaping, and eyes

fixed, watching the lips which had not ceased speaking. What would she add, she who had the right to judge, being beyond human interests.

"You have done wrong and given bad example."

"That is true."

"Perhaps God will forgive you when you ask forgiveness, but she, Davidée, who is but a woman, will she forgive?"

"I did not know her when I sinned. And I am young, Mother Fete-Dieu, and weak, and the other—the other is a kind of fate one cannot escape from."

"That is easily said, you have still got her hair on your clothes. Isn't that so?"

"They stick to the wool," replied the man.

"Do you disown her in your heart, that Phrosine?"

"I do not disown her, I should have to be a saint. I can only assure you that it is finished."

"Because you have left her?"

"No."

"Because she has gone? Ah, my poor fellow, you are indeed young. If she were to come back? Our hearts are weak."

"No, Mother Fete-Dieu, because of the little dead girl between us, I see her every night."

"Little Anna. Yes, yes, I, too, see her, with her expression so old for her age."

"Don't speak of her, she is the cause of my remorse. I tell you it is finished for ever."

"Amen. Remember, Maieul, that words spoken to a young girl who has lived like the young schoolmistress, are sacred."

"I think so, too."

"She is pure, that one feels. She is goodness itself, that is written in her eyes."

"And in her hands," murmured the man under his breath.

The old woman laughed softly. It amused her that anyone should admire a person's hands. She thought Maieul was badly in love, and some maternal and tender instinct prompted her to sing Davidée's praises, to be quite satisfied that the young man's intentions were honest.

"I have known several persons of her calling at Ardésie, but not one was ever so good as her shadow. She is kindness itself in what she finds to say to this, that, or the other person."

"Even when she scolds; I know something about that."

"Yes, in her voice and manner; and those whom she visits regret her when she leaves."

The invalid moved her head painfully backwards and forwards.

"You want her love, I suppose. You are not worthy of it."

"I do not need to be told so."

"Well?"

"I can become so."

She made no reply.

"You don't think I could?"

He bent eagerly forward, half rising. She saw the passion in his pale blue eyes. A gust of wind blew down on them, rustling the leaves of the vine. The old woman moved her hands nervously while she considered the answer she should give.

"I think," she said gravely, "that many things would be needed."

"I will do them. I have thought of several."

It seemed as though Maieul was asking for Davidée's hand, and that he had not received a definite refusal. He had risen, and all his youthful ardour shone in his face. And yet the woman who had spoken was but a stranger who had only seen the young girl whom she was defending, but once in her life. The old have mysterious authority.

"Grandmother," a young clear voice rang out, "they are going to bed. I am coming."

Galloping steps sounded over the hills, and with a spring Jeannie cleared a clump of heather and broom and appeared on the scene.

"I cannot tell you all I mean to do," said Maieul. "I have more than one project which I must carry out alone, without advice, because it is my own idea. Meanwhile, should I shoot a hare to-night, have you a messenger to take it to her?"

The old woman made a sign expressing that Jeannie, who was coming towards them and trying to catch the end of the conversation, would be ready with her basket. She drew a circle in the air, showing the round handle of the basket.

"Yes, yes, I understand," threw in the child, "I have a basket but Monsieur Maieul must fill it. Who is to receive what you shoot?"

"Hush, child, you will hear in good time."

"The police might overhear. It is better not to mention names."

Jeannie laughed softly at her grandmother's timidity. The old woman tried to rise to go back to bed.

"Lean on me," said Maieul, "my arm is strong."

He entered the house, and soon reappeared alone, walking noiselessly and rapidly up the hill. Before leaving his room at nightfall he had been careful to put on bathing shoes. On the edge of the path which winds over the hills, he stopped and picked up an old-fashioned, one-barrelled fowling-piece from a clump of grass. It had done good service in the hands of many a stonecutter of Trélazé before becoming the property of Maieul Sobersides, in exchange for a twenty-franc piece. He turned to the left, crossed a bush-grown table-land over La Gravelle, avoiding a sleeping farm-house, descended the hill to a meadow, and stood between a disused quarry and the railway which runs to Orléans. Maieul climbed with difficulty the railway embankment, and having got over on the other side, found himself in the open country with which he was very familiar. Surrounded by trees and hedges the fields slope slightly to the north. The stonecutter turned in that direction, leaving the town of Saint-Barthélemy on the left, crossed the high road, and plunged into a woody country which grew more and more wild, and where he felt sure that a gunshot would only awaken watchdogs or perhaps some farm servant jealous that anyone should be poaching on his preserves.

Virgin forests once covered this clayey and ferruginous soil, where the oak flourishes, and ferns, mosses and mullen grew in its shade keeping its roots moist. The woods of the park of Pignerolle and La Marmitière, those of Verrières and of l'Hôpital are the remains of the primitive forest; once they must have joined the woods of Écharbot; and between these two forests run the coppice of Bouleaux. Maieul

skirted the edge of the latter. Partridges flew up from under his feet. In the distance he could see the great farm of Haye-le-Roy, and coming up to it jumped over the hedge into the road, which runs at the back of the farm, and branches off in different directions at the end of the woods, into roads which equal in age the oldest cathedrals of France, and wind, like running water, through this deserted countryside; roads not planned by man, but which appear to serve as avenues uniting the peasant homes scattered at long distances along the route. Many great trees, especially oaks, grow on either side; the ground, which has never been levelled, is carpeted with grass. It is not much frequented by men, but cattle pass through to seek pastures—and marauding dogs and game abound. Maieul knew of an admirable hiding-place here in the split branch of a tree, which formed a cavity just large enough to enable a man to crouch, half lying on his left side. Bushes grew in front of it, forming a shelter without shutting out the view. Before climbing to his hiding place the hunter plucked a sprig of holly and put it in a conspicuous place in the middle of the path. Then he hid himself, loaded his fowling-piece and waited.

He was thinking of the words he had spoken to Mother Fete-Dieu.

“There are many things needed.”

The poor fellow had thought of one small proof of love, a present to offer to the girl he feared, and whose white hands he loved. He shrugged his shoulders as he thought of her, and of himself, a poacher hidden on the edge of the Bouleaux woods, this vigil of the Ascension.

“What a fool I am,” he thought; “to please

her one should know how to talk, and I dare not. I can only write songs, but I have no heart for singing. She has already passed judgment on me. She despises me because I lived with Phrosine. She will not change her opinion because of a hare. I was a fool to come. I should be more comfortable at home, under the roof of La Gravelle—— ”

He stayed, however, where he was without moving, he had left his tobacco behind that he might not be tempted to smoke. A long black form came galloping up the path, and the leaves rustled as the hunter instinctively lowered his weapon. He raised it again, quickly realising that the galloping form could only be a farm dog, of the redoubtable type, which silently pursues its quarry. By a sudden bending of the rushes a few yards away, Maieul guessed that the dog had leapt into the woods and was pursuing some prey.

“ I may as well go home,” he thought, “ my chance is gone.”

The noise ceased, not a breath stirred the leaves. It was fresh; the grass was heavy with moisture. A little ahead the fields could be seen, and the beginning of the hedges, the latter very black and the former a dull grey. The road was made lighter by the dew and by the parts worn smooth by the feet of many animals. And the sky gave light. High overhead, below the stars, the dying day still lingered in patches, as when at low tide water lingers in hollows in the sand. It was not the light of dawn, but it stretched from east to west dominating the country and making the stars pale—a light that would merge into the light of the new day. The world was sleeping—it was the middle hour of the short

summer night. Maieul who had been gazing at the sky caught sight, as he lowered his eyes, of a little alert form which came with a leap on to the path and stopped. He took aim, the hare raised its head and extended its ears ; reassured, it took three more leaps, sat up on a wee green mound, raised its front paws and considered the sprig of holly ; it had not seen it before. As it sat meditating there was a bright flash ; the report sounded as far as the woods of l'Hôpital where it died out among the leaves, as far as the farm of Haut Moulinet on the top of the hill, and was lost in space. Maieul Jacquet, his limbs stiff with the night air, and from his crouched position, came out of his hiding place, peered to right and left and stepped into the open. The hare was stretched on its side, its muzzle touching the holly, its white belly still heaving. Maieul gathered it up by its four paws and walked off, the little animal's head swaying as he walked.

At two o'clock the poacher reached home, he had met no one, with the exception of a doubtful shadow, seemingly of a crouching man who shrunk away among the hedges.

In the broad day of eight o'clock in the morning, little Jeannie climbed the steep path leading from her grandmother's over the broom covered hills. She was more serious than usual. Instead of the little black basket, which could hold a slice of bread and a little fruit, she carried an open wicker basket, heavily weighted. It was full of grasses and clover which hung down over the sides. Jeannie hurried, got on to the road and passed the church.

"How quickly you are walking, it isn't school time."

"What are you carrying?"

"Grass for the rabbits."

She walked so quickly that her companions had no time to put on boots or sabots to follow her. As red as her clover she reached the school, where only three pupils had preceded her. They ran forward with outstretched hands.

"What are you going to give the teachers? Let us see."

Jeannie turned, and pushing open the door with her shoulder, escaped. She nearly ran into Mademoiselle Renée standing in the courtyard, amused and benevolent, a little curious, and sure of her power.

"Come, little one, show me what's in your basket."

The child shook her head and made a dive for the door. She was nearly in tears.

"It is not for you."

She pushed open the school door, and began to call Davidée's name with the full power of her lungs. Davidée was coming down the stairs, buttoning her bodice, fresh as the morning.

"Don't make such a noise, dear, the house is not ten storeys high. It sounds like a street vendor calling his wares. What is the matter?"

"A present for you, Mademoiselle."

"From whom?"

"I mustn't say."

"I want to see too," said Mademoiselle Renée, "it appears that it is not for me. But I suppose you have no secrets."

"None," replied Davidée.

Jeannie looked from one to the other, and blushing furiously entered the little parlour and put the basket on the table.

Renée whisked off the blue cloth, and all three stood in front of it, with an embarrassed stare.

"But as it is for you, Mademoiselle, pluck up courage and open it. It is nearly school time."

Davidée threw aside grass and clover and, as white fur and clot of blood appeared, guessed the poacher's name. She turned pale and bit her lips.

Mademoiselle Renée laughed softly.

"This is a pretty thing," she repeated.

"Isn't it a beautiful hare, Mademoiselle," said Jeannie, her spirits rising. "Grandmama arranged it in the basket, and I gathered all the grass."

The headmistress finished uncovering the hare, carefully avoiding the blood. She was trembling with spite and could scarcely contain herself, though her voice was gentle and deceived the child, as it was intended to do.

"I congratulate you, Mademoiselle, you are the object of an attention which leaves no doubt as to the feelings you inspire and which are presumably shared by you."

"I beg of you——"

"But nothing could be more honourable. At the same time, this being the close season, you will cook it elsewhere, I hope. I am responsible here, I have no right—Jeannie, my child, you will be careful I hope not to speak of this, don't tell anyone what you brought in the basket, or the name of the gentleman."

Jeannie raised her hands with a—

"Oh, no Mademoiselle."

Davidée made no reply to Renée's remarks, but opening her purse with a decided air, took out a five-franc piece.

"Give this to the person who sent you here, child."

Rustic Jeannie realised the enormity of paying for a present, and hesitated to take the money.

"Do as I say and go into class."

The child took the money, and pulling up her pinafore, slipped it into her dress pocket, and went out. The two mistresses followed her. Davidée, who was the last, closed the house door and took the key.

From the Green Note-Book.—"I can no longer doubt; Maieul Jacquet has dared to cast his eyes upon me. I have been shivering all the morning. I feel insulted by this love, which at first makes no attempt at choosing, and then chooses too quickly. I am not hurt at his being a workman, I know what the other class is worth, often enough. But I am not Phrosine. I work. I am not necessarily touched by a compliment or a present. What does he think? How could he suppose I would accept. How imprudent, too, in a town like this, scandal-mongering takes the place of news. Jeannie, I am sure, would not chatter. Mademoiselle Renée has said nothing; Mother Fete-Dieu does not receive visits, and yet all the town, all the villages, are chattering this evening about the night's hunting of the slate-cutter; my name is bandied about, words, intentions, adventures, and perhaps faults are attributed to me, so that Mademoiselle Renée seems to be in the right as against me, whereas I have nothing to reproach myself with. My answer annoyed the young man, of that I have good proof. At six o'clock, the hour at which the men return from the quarries, Mademoiselle Renée and I were sitting in the little parlour; it gives us no pleasure to be together, and we were

correcting our copybooks, or rather I was helping her to correct hers ; I try not to give her too many reasons for hating me. It was warm, and we had the window open, but the house door was closed, I closed it myself. Suddenly there was a crash of glass, I jumped up saying :

“ ‘How scandalous, someone is throwing stones.’

“ But my headmistress caught me by the arm and pointed to something which was rolling on the floor.

“ ‘No, Mademoiselle, it is your silver coin come back to you. You have a lover who has excellent manners.’

“ I could not help replying :

“ ‘At least he has a certain standard of honour. I humiliated him, and he protests. I like that better. As to the rest, you know he is nothing to me. Unfortunately I cannot prevent people from persecuting me——’

‘ And if you had the power ?

“ ‘I should beg them not to trouble about me, and to leave your assistant in peace.’

“ Yes, I answered that, and yet in spite of myself, I think of Maieul and the grief I have caused him. I was compelled to act, as I did. But he, he had passed the night out of doors, watching for his hare ; he had thought of me, whispering my name, hoping perhaps for a beginning of friendship, perhaps for less, only I might have some confidence in him. And I have caused him to suffer. Of the two I am sure I suffer the most, though I do not love him. How ridiculous it is, how can I cure this excessive sensitiveness ? The cloud has passed over, and the rain falls. O heart, that loves to weep.”

CHAPTER IX

FROM THE GREEN NOTE-BOOK

"6TH JUNE 1909 Trinity Sunday :—

I could no longer tolerate this atmosphere of hostility. As we had a short holiday at Whitsuntide, I ran down to La Charente Inférieure. My brother was there. He complained of the ill-temper of his chiefs, and of injustice of which he had been the victim. My mother complained of the solitude she had lived in for months, and which would again be her lot after we had left. She complained also of my father, who spends half his time at the café. He complained of his health, undermined I fear, of his political friends whose attentions towards him have decreased, and who, a thing my father never forgives, no longer fear their master, now ageing. I could also have brought my share of troubles to that pretty but sad house. I should have liked to do so. A certain grumbling cowardice is natural. But I threw aside trouble, I became a child again, everyone turned to me.

"'Come for a walk.'

"'No, stay with me. Console me. Sit by my side and sew in silence.'

"I used all my ingenuity to preserve the peace between those weary, nerve-racked beings.

They desperately desire happiness, and know not where to find it. It gave me food for thought. I brought happiness to them, but for a short time only ; and what trouble it cost me. How convinced I am that I cannot play the part for long ; it calls for more strength and greater resources than I possess. I feel weak in a life full of difficulty, which demands great and continual exertion. I have ardour, energy, will, yes, but fatigue comes quickly, and when it is not fatigue there comes a very clear perception that I am nothing, although I can make myself liked. To persuade my children to work out of affection for me, that is not to provide them with a guide.

“In cases where I have gained a victory against selfishness, indifference, the moral sleep of the world I live in, both at home and here, I have gained it in the name of noble truth, which I have affirmed, and which I could not support by arguments, truths which are instinctive, or which have come to me I know not whence.

“To-day the first communicants returned to the holy table. I was there at the ceremony out of consideration for their parents, and sitting behind them. I saw children, little ones under ten, returning from the altar with clasped hands and eyes lowered, penetrated by a joy we cannot give them, and which bears no resemblance to the joy we can give them. All did not have that transfigured look, which shows that the body is but the envelope of adoration, or the shade of a lighted lamp. The majority did. I was very touched. I thought, ‘Catholics, you will have to lower the Communion rails,

the little lips could scarcely reach above the white cloth; the priest was bent in two. If I were one of you, how beautiful I should think it; lower the barriers, multiply the divine visits, place love within the newly built infant prison.'

"I thought, 'there is an undeniable fitness between these budding souls and the prodigy of faith offered to them. They are so weak, they have so many natural failings, so little religious instruction, they all take the same flight on this occasion, and to what regions?'

"I thought, 'And I? What part am I playing in this question? I have not destroyed faith, like Barrentier, who cannot see a crucifix without foaming; like Judemil, who makes his pupils sing, "Away with Christ, away with Him"; like some of my own companions, whose hatred is secret, bitter, and erudite I have not turned my little ones from the faith, but I have done nothing to help them to believe. I have spoken idle words I feel that I am a sower of empty pods, which do not blossom into joy.'

"Yet these children love me, because they still hope. They have been told that like all schoolmistresses I possess the secret of happiness. They believe, they must believe, that what I teach is enough to carry one through life. Their mothers think it and their fathers and several of my superiors. Mademoiselle Renée also believes it, with her little limited mind, a garden shut in by walls. No, what I teach is only commercial value. I do not make women, I have not the secret. There is something else, the chief thing, that I do not possess myself, which I cannot give to

them, and which I can only guess at. I have been convinced for a long time that my state of mind, my interests, limited to my professional duties could be called peace. To live for my class; books, lessons, regardless of consequences. I have been thrown amongst good and evil, they press round me. It is imperative that I should come to a decision, and in acting I discover my poverty. Old Mother Fete-Dieu is rich, some of my children to-day are obviously rich, and I do not resemble them. Phrosine, whom I consider guilty, whom I consider morally destitute and abandoned, had only to recall to me my conventional morality, to jeer at it, for me to perceive that she was in the right so far as I was concerned, but that we were both wrong, before the other moral law, the powerful law, the law which alone can command with authority in this world of revolt in which we live, which, against our insatiable and cruel love of self, can set up another power, that law which can alone speak of purity. I have never seen pure faces, they disturb me. To be clean, is so far, so far removed from that marvel—purity.

“I ask myself whether happiness, real happiness, is not rooted in this secret force. That would explain why it is so rare. And I—how can I protect myself? If Maieul Jacquet makes me a real declaration of love, what shall I say to him? I am not one of those who says yes before the end of the first verse of love—I have proved that. But if I were to ask him for a proof that he regrets the past, better than just a word, what proof could I ask? Is not his heart the same heart that loved Phrosine yesterday?

Where can I look for support outside of myself, for my eyes that will pass, my lips that will fade, I who desire to be always loved? I think of this and find no answer.

“Mademoiselle Renée says I am compromised. I think she would wish me to be. No, I watch in this time of trouble. I am like the women of Blandes, who leave their house and walk along the seashore barefooted over the shells, looking at the sky covered with darkness, and who say, ‘It is, however, morning. What will happen to us? There is no daylight. What fierce storm is about to break? Or will the wind blow the storm away?’”

“Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, as it was very hot, and my throat was parched with hours of reading aloud, dictating, reprimanding, and also from the used atmosphere of the classroom, I walked part of the way with some of the children. I went beyond the church, for the first time entering the cemetery alone. The broom near the gate was in flower. I was leaning against the wall, my arm stretched over the hot stones; Anna’s tomb was in front of me, a little plot among trampled grass, crosses, green oaks. I looked at it. The child who lives furthest from the school had reached home, and I heard the door close. There was nothing to warn me that anyone was near, and yet I felt that I was watched. I half turned and caught sight of him on the other side of the road. He was bareheaded and in work dress, his sleeves turned up. He did not speak, but I can still see his look of passionate reproach. When I turned away again I could feel his eyes on my hair and hand. Then I heard steps going in

the other direction. On the morrow I saw Maieul on the other side of the green deep pond near the church. And the day after, too. He was sitting on the stones, his feet hanging over the water. He did not move, but his heart spoke to me. I did not go back again. I believe that sombre and passionate Maieul has ceased working on my account."

The moment that Davidée was writing these words Maieul was returning from a meeting of workmen at Trélazé. With other men, he had threatened and assaulted an overseer accused of trampling on and smashing a pile of slates stacked in front of one of the workmen's shelters. No one knew for certain who had committed the outrage. In the early morning, an engineer who was on his way to his post in the machine-room in one of the quarries, noticed the damage, but proofs as to the identity of the culprit were lacking. The overseer, however, was hated; five years previously he had publicly smashed hundreds of slates which he declared were rotten: slates which the workmen had to replace. The incident still lingered in the tenacious memory of the workmen. The man was accused of the new outrage, in order that punishment for the past might be meted out. He denied it. For two hours held prisoner by two hundred men, he had stood against the wall of the low-ceilinged room, trying to defend his post conquered by fifteen years' work, to save his bread, his family, uphold his right to live in the blue village, where he had a garden and friends, where he was accustomed to live. The men in front of him did not keep their seats for ten minutes. A leader pronounced the three words. "It is he." The whole

band rose to their feet, a dense pack with uplifted hands, shouting, pressing backwards and forwards, crowded into one side of the room, advancing against the wall, receding and returning to their victim, who stood on a chair with outstretched arms and open mouth, shouting words that no one heard. Blows, direct or covert, rained on him. He did not attempt to return them, nor to hold his clothes, torn in shreds. His waistcoat buttons had been torn off, his bare chest was seen through his open shirt, his trousers were falling, his necktie and cuffs were gone.

"It was not I, cowards, it was not I," he cried, without ceasing.

After two hours of torture, as he had not yielded, the men declared a strike in order to compel the Commission of the Slate Quarries to dismiss the man, who refused to resign. He left, passing between two living hedges who fell on him, striking out with their fists. Followed by a last howl of execration, he disappeared into the night, feeling his way along the wall, and as he turned into the street was recognised by the nerve-racked women who were waiting for the return of the men, and who, throwing wide their windows, cried :

"Pig, traitor," and spat as the bent, torn, lamentable spectacle passed.

Maieul was returning ; he had left the town and streets and reached the hills where the splinters of slate break beneath one's feet with the plaintive chirp of crickets. He was walking slowly, and as the full moon appeared from under the heavy warm clouds his eyes sought the roof and gables of the schoolhouse, which

rose above the neighbouring houses. He thought of the woman who had rejected him. He imagined Davidée asleep, as she should be at that hour. He was more powerfully moved than usual. It was not altogether pity that he had felt at the close of the meeting when the overseer had grown pale and the blood ran slowly down his face as though his veins were exhausted. He had stopped shouting then, shame and remorse grew stronger. The remembrance of his cowardly life rose from the troubled depths of his soul and took possession of him.

"It is a very fine thing you are doing! You have joined with two hundred other men to attack this man, you have half-stunned him, you stand here watching him suffer because you have not the courage to kill him. Have you a strong will? Have you energy? You do not resist the summons of your comrades. They say you have a strong character, yes, because you are easily angered. But what causes your anger? Are the motives of your anger very creditable?"

Thoughts of Davidée mingled with remorse for his past life.

"You are surprised that the young schoolmistress despises you, but she is right. What are you beside her? You, who loved her servant. Her heart is like little Jeannie Fete-Dieu's. It is proud, and you are nothing in comparison to her."

Standing among the brambles Sobersides decided that he was not worth much, and then he thought that his love for Davidée was so great that it burnt like fever. With eyes of love

he pictured the dark eyes, pale face, and white hands of the schoolmistress. Vague thoughts rushed through his mind. Could he have expressed them he might have said :

“Your hands instinctively raise themselves in pity ; they express your thoughts. When you join them they seem to hold a lighted torch. Is it the torch of youth, or of kindness, or of forgiveness that you hold in your hands? I have seen none like them, so delicate, white and touching.”

As he was only a simple man he found but one phrase to say, and he repeated it for the benefit of the distant roof.

“If I held that hand in mine I would walk very straight, very straight.”

The heat was penetrating ; it seemed to cling to branches and leaves, grass and brambles. To the south, flashes of lightning succeeded each other with rapidity, but the storm was too distant for the thunder to be heard. The world seemed asleep. And yet—what passions kept vigil in the dumb countryside. Love, hate, envy, ambition. The lights of the suburbs stretched away into the night. As Maieul went up the outer staircase his thoughts shaped themselves into a definite resolution. He pushed open the door, felt a rush of cool air from the empty room, lit his lamp, opened the window and sat down surrounded by a host of dancing gnats, to compose a letter to Davidée Birot.

CHAPTER X

MAIEUL'S SONG

THE letter was brief.

"Mademoiselle, I beg the honour of a few words with you. I cannot come to the school as the other mistress would insult me. There is something I wish to do, but I should like to ask you beforehand whether it be right. On Thursday next, June 10th, at one o'clock I will be on the hill near the quarry of La Gravelle. Jeannie Fete-Dieu, and one of the Breton women will be with me. I should be very happy if you were to pass that way. The fear of displeasing you fills my heart. I am, Mademoiselle, with great respect, your servant, Maieul Jacquet.

"P.S. The strike will probably have been declared by then, but that will make no difference. When I say a thing I do it."

Davidée received the letter by post. She read it twice. The first time with a certain irritation; the second time she lingered over the phrase, "The fear of displeasing you fills my heart," and said,

"I will go."

The strike began on Monday. It was not of much importance at first, groups of men stood about, threatening and insulting and attempting to stir up the workmen. All the slate-cutters

had left work, the quarries were deserted. The sound of slate crackling under the iron had ceased. The horses, surprised at being left in their stables, bent their necks as the door opened expecting the man who entered to put on their collars ; but instead of doing so he threw each one an armful of hay with a—

“Hullo, old boy, get fat, take a holiday, we’ve all struck work.”

The taverns were full. The drinkers, who at first all spoke at once, were wearied with talking, with listening, and above all with drinking, and breathing the atmosphere heavy with wine. Leaning against the wall they listened to the indefatigable orator, who needed no intervals, his Adam’s apple dancing like the shuttle of a machine under his beard. The housewives sat at home, unhappy because there would be no money coming in on pay-day, scolded the children, and hid silver pieces which seemed unsafe in the drawer of the table. If they went out to hang anything in the little yard, they listened eagerly for any noise which might come from the taverns. What was the outcry towards Fresnais?

“I say,” one would cry to the other, “do you like to have a man out of work? It curdles my blood.”

Some fine girls, however, young and bright-eyed, promenaded the streets, arm in arm. They did not stop as they passed the men, but slackened their pace. One of them wore a red scarf round her white throat, and the noise which the women heard coming from Fresnais was the sound of the men applauding her. As night came down, the twittering of the sparrows, and the des-

perate cries of the martins made more clamour than the men who were on strike. The second day, the streets were as quiet as the grave until past two. The morning's rain having ceased, a procession was organized, a red flag borne aloft struck terror into the hearts of the peaceful men, and the ranks of the processionists were swelled by many of them. The procession came up with two carts coming from the quarries loaded with slates; they fell upon the drivers, and broke the horses' harness to bits. The news spread quickly. Alarm grew. Mothers asked "Is my child safe?" two or three times an hour.

The secret committees formed long since, began to break from the masses who awaited orders, and who had merely changed one authority for another. Journalists had been seen at Ardésie, and a strange policeman innocently taking a walk with his wife. When he heard insults thrown at him he grasped the situation, his wife though alarmed was careful to smile the same broad smile, when anyone looked her way, to show that she was not a prisoner. At night a shot was fired, here and there. Children woke up screaming, men who wished to work were alarmed for the safety of their households. Footsteps sounded on the roads, but not those of a marching force: the troops had not yet arrived, the passers were civilians. Behind shut and bolted doors old men recognised the voices of the strikers going to a meeting.

"Things look black," they said, "there goes a fire alarm. To-morrow the troops will be here."

And the third day the hills looked bright with scarlet uniforms. A company of soldiers was encamped in the market place, another at Trélazé, where there were also policemen out for pleasure. Journalists came to interview Mademoiselle Renée; they rang at the school door during class time. Renée went to the door herself, she was pale and as determined not to say a word, as if she were guarding some professional secret. Besides, she really knew nothing at all about it.

"My duty, gentlemen, keeps me among my pupils."

They informed her that dragoons were patrolling the line running to Orléans, that soup had been distributed that morning, and that money was coming from Paris, from the north and from the east.

When the journalists had gone, the children began to tell of the things happening at home. When the mistress came back they held out their hands as pupils do when a question has been asked, and they know the answer. The democratic passion which they had inherited was hard to combat. They contradicted each other, all anxious to add new information, to take part in the drama, to volunteer their father's opinion upon the matter. Some were for, some against the strike. Little innocent girls blurted out:

"Yes, Mademoiselle, they have sworn it; if a single workman is injured, soldiers will be killed; the workmen will join hands, and will push them into the deep pits, where they can't get out."

"It's true, Mademoiselle, my father said so. Near our house by the old pit the earth is under-

mined ; it will give way, and they will fall into the pit or the water."

"And there are stones and bricks to throw—plenty of them."

"And also barbed wire to prevent the horses advancing."

"There is dynamite too."

"And there are also," said a fresh young voice trembling with emotion, "men who don't want any harm to be done to anyone. My father voted for the strike, but he says that if a single soldier or policeman is injured, he will turn upon the cowards."

"What cowards?"

"You."

Cries of protest arose, but ceased as the sound of horses' hoofs was heard through the open windows. The children climbed on the benches, jostling one another. Through the closed door they could hear that the children in the next class were also climbing on the benches.

"It is the soldiers, Mademoiselle."

"The dragoons."

"There are twenty, thirty, no thirty-two. The officer does not look easy-going."

"What a pretty uniform."

"And moustache."

"Look at that man over there ; he comes from our place. Francis!"

And Francis turned and showed his white teeth in a smile, his hand on his horse's mane.

At twelve o'clock, the mistresses decided to give the children dinner at school. The streets seemed scarcely safe. Davidée, who was not afraid, went to buy bread with one of the elder girls. Dinner was a scratch meal. Class began

late that afternoon—what did it matter? The school had been turned into a kind of shelter. At half-past four the mistresses escorted the two bands of little girls, one to the right and the other to the left, and watched them disperse over roads and hills, where men in large numbers were moving to the east.

The heat was tropical. Davidée went up to the attic over Renée's room and looked out of the skylight down the road. She could see the workyards, disused quarries, and deep hollows in the blue soil. In the market-place of Ardésie the sun shone on the guns of the soldiers, who were sleeping on the ground. In the distance, a mounted officer was outlined against the horizon, scanning the country with his field-glasses. Little bands of women could be seen moving about in the direction in which the officer was looking. The meadows slept under their ripe crops; men with horny hands, whom the strike had made idle, walked about among the crops indifferent to the harvest, picking buttercups and daisies for the girls waiting at the gates.

The 10th June came at last. It was a Thursday, and the feast of Corpus Christi. Fortunately the children had a holiday. Would they come on the morrow? Without the reassuring protection of father or mother they might be afraid of the noise borne on the wind—shouts, whistles, the senseless knocking at doors, the impressive passing of processions through the streets of Ardésie. In the vicinity of the school, things were quiet, but the noise came from a distance. The school and the old houses adjoining were like an island surrounded by the tide. Mademoiselle Renée had a headache and

would not be down before lunch. As the milk-woman had not been round in the cart, Davidée went for the milk. She supposed that for fear of the strikers the woman from the farm of La Mouronnerie had taken a short cut into town, avoiding the roads frequented by the men. It was a bad sign. As the assistant mistress, holding her jug, pushed open the farm-gate, the farm-girl received her brusquely.

"Shut the door well," she cried, but in spite of her fear, face, arms and hands were as red as usual. "You must have heard the row last night. No? Did you sleep?"

"More or less."

"Good Lord! Bombs, stones, we could hear them flying through the air from here. Well, don't sleep now. It appears that the great battle will be fought this afternoon."

"You are trembling so, Mariette, that you are not giving me full measure."

But the girl did not laugh.

"You are new, Mademoiselle," she replied. "You don't know that it is always the women who weep in a strike."

Davidée returned to the school, more moved than she cared to show. She walked slowly, seemingly engrossed in watching the milk in her jug, but really thinking of the rendezvous she had accepted. Ought she to go at one o'clock to the appointed post on the hill? Last week it was a daring act of charity; had it not now become impossible? And above all, useless? Maieul would not be free. Because of his great strength and his ascendancy over his comrades he was one of those who could not leave the battlefield of the strike. He would not be

allowed to leave. The young girl reached the school, and as she paused before the door the thought of Mademoiselle Renée ill through fear made her smile.

"No, I will not fail I promised. Maieul would not have written without some serious reason. I cannot refuse to hear him. Perhaps he has some service to ask of me. May it not be news of Phrosine, dangerous to him, and no longer dangerous if shared with me? Besides, if he has merely the intention of continuing his declaration of the other day, I shall be very pleased to have gone, I will make him understand that I am not like certain others, that I am reserving myself for I don't know whom, perhaps only for loneliness, but in any case loneliness untroubled by remorse."

She pushed open the door, and turning towards the blue stoney hills murmured

"What a strange fate. I have been driven to taking up arms against two lovers, and thereby have earned the friendship of both, perhaps because of my severity; or have gained two confidants, both compromising."

Davidée finished washing the lunch things at half-past twelve, and going up to her room put on her hat, a little round straw hat retrimmed from the previous summer.

As she was going down she came face to face with Mademoiselle Renée, who pale and with dishevelled hair was coming up with a cup of tea.

"Are you going out, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle"

"I wished to make sure. You are going out in spite of the strike?"

"I am going to see the scene at close quarters."

"In a white hat?"

"I have no red one."

"It is madness."

The tone was so tragic that Davidée restrained a laugh with difficulty. But all inclination to laugh faded as she closed the door and turned to make her way to the place of rendezvous. She passed through the market square occupied by a detachment of soldiers, and turning to the left climbed by the shortest path to the top of the hills. On her way she met but few people, workmen acting as sentinels, a group of women, two children picking flowers unconscious of the strike. And then no one. She was alone on a table land covered with broom and brambles. Before her was the disused quarry of La Gravelle, with its deep, still lake, and here was the spot which Maieul had appointed. She had been walking quickly, and there was still ten minutes to the time. She entered the wood and walking to the edge, pushed aside the branches. Stretched before her were the lands, the workyards, the machinery, all the vast dirty district where the men were fighting their battle. How was it she had met so few people on her way? The answer was written large on the countryside. The whole populace was over there near the deserted yards, where the stacks of slate were stationary. A dull continuous murmur came up from the valley and travelled over the hills. Impossible to distinguish what the men were shouting, until suddenly a great cry went up and Davidée caught the words:

"Down with Trémart, death to traitors!"

"Maieul cannot possibly come," Davidée thought, "he must be over there in the midst of the black crowd besieging the gate of the yard." Before the big closed gates which opened every morning at work time, a vast crowd was assembled, the quarrymen, their wives, and numerous children. The mass seethed backwards and forwards, but from a distance it was impossible to tell the reason. Even with glasses Davidée could scarcely have recognised faces, but one or two of the men she could pick out by their build and movements. A detachment of mounted dragoons, sitting statue-like in their saddles, guarded the side of the hill crowned by the machinery of the quarry, sections of infantry surrounded the enclosure on the other side. Officers ran from one detachment to the other. Men attempting to scale the wall fell amid howls of rage and hate. The lines of soldiers faltered, Davidée thought they were probably being pelted with stones. Horses curvetted, some of the besiegers made a dash round the enclosure to discover a weak spot and invade the yard. Davidée followed their movements eagerly, "Maieul is an important unit in that human torrent," she thought. She saw in imagination the soldiers taking aim, the first ranks of the assailants fall, their comrades scaling the hill and then a flame, a colossal flame shoot up and envelope the petrol-soaked beams. She shivered with a moment's fear. The crowd which had gathered, as though to view a spectacle and judge the combatants, seemed to her stupid. They were massed together in the gardens bordering on the road, among them were women

with parasols and fashionable hats. And towering over all, rose the big beams, pulleys, cables, pumps, and dynamos of the mines, against which the assault was being made. The cries of "Down with Trémart," had ceased. Little grievances were forgotten. It was the old leaven stirring, the past revolt against the employers, a fever of destruction, a fever to grasp, the remembrance of a cruel phrase uttered by a dead overseer to dead workmen, the promise of a new Society, more happiness, the resurgence of an overthrown power, an equality destroyed and the prejudice of the manual labourers. Davidée, kneeling on the hillside, head and shoulders projecting from the wood, exposed to sun and wind, was trembling and suffering, wishing she could throw herself between the combatants. She thought of those in that mass, who were in some way connected with her.

"My quarriers are drunk with anger. Fathers and brothers of my little pupils are there. May there be no deaths among them, or among the others. I pity all, though my first thought is for those connected with my little ones. A shot, two : they were fired by the workmen before the yard gate. Besieged and besiegers are in movement. The soldiers are marching against the black crowd which has grown enormous on the right. On the left, the dragoons are marching forward. The yard is invaded. Swords are drawn. The soldiers are charging the crowd, forcing an entrance to the yard. They have rushed upon that howling mass. I see the stones hurtling through the air. The men are seeking refuge in shelters ; they are turning carts over. Yes, there are women among them. In a few years, old

pupils of mine may take part in such a scene. The men are repulsed. They are in a cloud of dust. The crowd along the road and in the gardens is agitated, and the *Internationale* with its false note of religion hovers over that horrible spectacle. I can see nothing more. A dense cloud of dust has blotted out the scene. Why are the spectators applauding?"

Davidée climbed on to the fence to see better. What was happening? Piercing cries went up from the besiegers, and all faces were turned now towards the valley and Davidée. What were they looking at? The anxious girl suddenly saw a man running along the road. Three, four, five men were following him.

"Will they catch him? No, he has jumped into a field; now they are close on him; he leads again; he is losing ground. Poor wretch, it must be Trémart whom they have discovered, and who is trying to escape from them. He is jumping the hedge. Ah, no, he has fallen."

The pursuers fell on the fallen man with their sticks. At that moment a cry went up which reached Davidée.

"Sober-sided! Carry him off."

The five men surrounding the fallen Maieul were joined by a band of a hundred strikers or more; it became impossible to distinguish the victim from his assailants.

Davidée, pale and trembling, ran down the hill towards Ardésie, avoiding the houses.

"Is it possible Maieul has been wounded on my account? There is no other reason. I am sure he has never betrayed his comrades, never; he told a schoolmistress he would be in the wood of La Gravelle at one, and he did not want

to fail. I am the cause of this trouble. He is rather like me, that man, if he has promised to do a thing he jumps all obstacles. Who will give me news of him? I cannot go and ask, the soldiers guard the roads and fighting is still going on."

The clamour ceased for a moment, only to break out again. The young girl reached the school and sick with anxiety, instead of going to her room, went into the classroom where, standing on a chair, she leant on the window frame. She thought by standing there she would see the passers-by and call out for news. But the road was deserted. She could not see the valley. Before her the hedges of meagre bushes, denuded pasture lands without cattle, slate quarries without workmen. A cloud of dust floated over the mine, which Davidée could not see. Fighting had not ceased. Every now and again the distant countryside was shaken as by a storm; she could feel the ground tremble with the gallop of the horses and the rush of great crowds.

"It was for me that he exposed himself to danger, that he ran and fell," she kept repeating.

She saw a woman timidly crossing the market place and beckoned to her, but the woman made a sign that she was hurrying home, and did not care to linger out of doors. Towards four o'clock Mariette, the servant from the farm of Mouronnerie, passed, driving two cows home as quickly as she could.

"Has anyone been wounded, Mariette?"

"Yes, several"

"Any dead?"

"They say so."

The girl was already some yards from the school; she turned and called out:

"I told you the women cry. Shut your window, and go and pray if you know how."

She was angry, remembering that Davidée had laughed at her in the morning. Shortly after an ambulance passed, and the soldier who was driving, seeing a pretty girl at the window, cracked his whip.

"Have you any news of a man named Maieul Jacquet?"

"Zut," replied the soldier, shrugged his shoulders, and spurred up his horse.

As night came on, a truce was called. The noise of voices and the clamour ceased. Davidée guessed that in spite of all, combatants had gone home to supper. In civil discord as long as war has not broken out such things can happen. She went out, ran up the road, and startled an old woman by going into her kitchen. The old woman smiled apologetically as she recognised her.

"I am lighting my fire for the soup, Made-moiselle Davidée. You took me by surprise. How red you are. Has anything happened at your place?"

The schoolmistress was ashamed to show the emotion she felt. She turned to the door, leant against the wall, and breathed the night air as children do when they have been romping on the way.

"I ran too fast," she said, "I am not brave enough. Tell me, Mother Jumelé, is it true that a man has been killed?"

"You mean Sobersides?"

"Yes, he was wounded."

"So badly that he was brought home on a stretcher. His head was bleeding and his eyes closed, and it was three hours before he opened them."

"What did the doctor say?"

"He was not there."

"Why not?"

"He was not called. The quarrymen arrange these things themselves. It is better not to mix oneself in them. As soon as Maieul regained consciousness he asked to speak not to the doctor, but to the strike leaders.

"‘I want the leaders,’ he said, ‘they will be told why I left the field; I was not betraying my side. Am I a traitor?’ That’s what he said."

"And the leaders?"

"Two came, a Council was held there in his rooms. It appears they replied: ‘Sobersides, you were in the right.’ But what was said no one knows. Now he has fever, and the Breton women are nursing him. They don’t know whether he will recover."

Mother Jumelé, having succeeded in lighting her fire, came up to Davidée and, having ascertained that no one was near enough to listen said:

"For my part, Mademoiselle Davidée, I believe it’s again a woman who brought him to ruin."

Davidée looked out over the road to the hill of La Gravelle, half hidden in the night, and at a star rising over it.

"Some ruin, and some save," she replied.

"Well if I were that woman," answered Mother Jumelé, "I shouldn’t feel happy in my mind."

And Davidée was not. She passed out into the stormy night, a prey to anxiety. Bands of strikers promenaded the streets singing. Her one desire was for the day to come that she might have news of Maieul.

"How sorrow changes us," she thought. "No, I am not the cause, no, I have not done anything wrong, no, I do not love him, but since he was wounded I cannot get the thought of him out of my head, and my heart bleeds for pity."

Three days passed. It was said that Maieul was better and had been seen on the Sunday evening enjoying the air on his staircase.

"He looks like one come back from the grave," added the women.

The strike was not finished, but the passion and enthusiasm which characterised it at first had died out. Strikers and cavalry came to blows less frequently. Many workmen were hay-making. Mothers no longer dared to ask the bakers for credit, or to send their children.

On the fourth day Davidée had escorted the children past the church, as their mothers were frightened of them going alone, and was returning. There were houses on one side of the road only, and far apart one from the other. She was so used to the poor houses and dusty road, that she looked neither to right or left, and was lost in thought. She was thinking of the long summer weeks, the silent mornings and evenings in the school where she and Renée were enemies. The sun was blazing. Davidée walked in the middle of the road, the edge of her skirt was grey with dust. She was not far from the school, when she suddenly stopped short :

"Mademoiselle Davidée."

The voice came from behind the hedge, where there were no houses. Davidée recognised Maieul's voice and crossed over. He raised his scarred face, pale with suffering, as she came near. His eyes were hollow, his head wrapped in bandages, through his unbuttoned shirt she could see a long wound on his shoulder. He was leaning on a stick.

"I could not come the other day, Mademoiselle Davidée, you must forgive me."

"How badly they have wounded you?"

"A little."

"They might have killed you."

"I bear them no ill-will, they thought I was playing the traitor. We have made it up; I explained."

"That you had an appointment with me?"

Her suspicion brought a grave look to his eyes.

"I said another name, as you may suppose."

They were silent a moment, the mute figure of Phrosine was between them

"I am leaving the country on her account," he said at last.

"You are going in search of her?"

"No, indeed, Mademoiselle Davidée, don't get angry with me, don't turn away, don't yet run back to the school. I am unhappy enough."

The last phrase brought Davidée back, but her eyes were turned towards the school.

"Say what you have to say quickly, someone is waiting for me."

"No one waits for me, here or elsewhere. In the town I am going to, Combrée, about ten miles distant, I know no one. It was I, however, who asked to be sent to that quarry. I

asked long before the strike was declared. I cannot stand this any longer. I do not wish to offend you, but here in Ardésie, now that I am alone, I am haunted by the past. I cannot work properly. My comrades say, 'You are not as happy as you were, Maleul—when you went to the house in the Plains.' "

"And it is true?"

"Yes, you cannot understand that. You are a young girl, but all the same it was you who separated us. I wanted to tell you that I am leaving, that I bear you no ill-will, that at the bottom of my heart I am thankful, that I love her no longer, not in the very least. But——"

"Well?"

"I am still afraid of her."

He thought that she was moving off without replying, that she was lost to him.

"You know all, now," he said quickly, "and you despise me."

To his surprise she did not leave him. She stood in the middle of the road, and bending her head, looked with gentleness and pity at the man who had humbled himself before her. She did not wish to be hard. She always encouraged her pupils who owned to their faults.

"You are mistaken," she said, "I do not despise you, I think you are acting for the best."

"Since you approve, I shall have more courage. I am made of poor stuff, Mademoiselle Davidée."

"So am I. There are many ways of being poor."

"Since my parents' death I have had no one

to reprove me when I have done wrong. You were the first. I am more grieved by that child's death than I can tell you."

And as Davidée still lingered, and because her expression was kindly, he grew daring, and touching his wounded head, he said "I am going, but when I am cured in more ways than one, may I see you again? I have never known anyone like you, Mademoiselle Davidée."

"I do not come from this part of the country, so that is not surprising."

"As you pass the trees bend their heads in a loving salute."

"No, Monsieur Maieul, the wind bends them."

"As the children see you coming in the distance, their hearts leap to meet you."

"Mine does the same; I am theirs."

"You love only them, that is well known."

And as she still lingered, her head bent kindly towards him, he again repeated,

"When I have proved myself an honourable man, may I see you again?"

She did not reply, but her face grew pale, and she moved away slowly.

Davidée was very busy all that afternoon. She had to take her class, receive some of the parents, arrange the songs for a feast day, and prepare the vegetables for dinner, it being her week. At night—tired though she was—she could not sleep. She sat before the window far into the night, thinking of Maieul's departure, and of what he had said. Some of his words brought pleasure but others swept pleasure away.

"I am still afraid of her," she thought, and the words killed the gentleness in her heart. The sky was clear, but there was no moon, and a light summer mist lay over the fields, so that it was difficult to distinguish houses from hedges. But Davidée could see enough to picture the whole of Ardésie, with its familiar roads and faces. Someone was leaving this little corner of the world, where he could find no peace, because of a bygone word. What ruptures! She tried to think, but one idea obsessed her, and she kept repeating like a chorus of a song, the phrase:

"These are his last hours here, at dawn he will leave like Phrosine."

The earth bathed in dew gave out the same perfume as when rain has fallen. The silence was so intense, that the drops of water could be heard falling from the leaves. It was so intense that before daybreak Davidée, who had thrown herself on her bed, jumped up with a start. She heard a man singing and recognised the voice. She opened her shutters gently and leant out. The voice was not very near, and came from a traveller walking in the night.

*"Celle en qui j'ai mis ma pensée
N'a jamais eu d'pensée pour moi,
C'est pour elle que je m'en vas,
Toute ma jeunesse est passée*

*Je m'en vas le cœur en tourment
Mon cœur emporte son idée,
Elle est après lui attachée,
Comme un furet qui boit son sang "*

The tune was sad, sad as the low plaintive song of the herdsmen returning from ploughed fields. It grew more distant, the words no

longer reached Davidée's window. As day dawned the voice ceased. One woman only understood the song, though many may have heard it. But when the sun rose over La Gravelle another harmony was borne upon the wind as soft as the summer breeze, and each soul interpreted it differently. Little children, waking up early in their beds in the heated low-roofed houses, began to laugh and woke up their parents.

"Listen, father, it's Maieul's flute; how pretty, how long it is since it was played."

Their youthful minds heard only the dancing notes. The slate-cutters, washing themselves in their gardens, smiled in surprise.

"That is not strike music. What is Maieul thinking of?"

Old Mother Fete-Dieu joined her hands and murmured:

"Bring him back, Lord, with a clean soul, and a flute that weeps no more"

She understood, and one other, a pretty schoolmistress, who was touched now and softened, whispered.

"He loves me still, it is love's sad farewell."

The flute could still be heard, but so faintly that it was evident the musician was moving away over the country roads, before the sun was fully risen; it was as faint as the low buzzing of a gnat. Later on the news spread that Maieul Jacquet had left the country.

CHAPTER XI

THE INSPECTOR

AFTER the 10th of June, although the strike had finished its bloodshed, parents were afraid for their children. Even the most violent of them said, "There are people everywhere on the hills; we had better take care."

The school was nearly empty on Tuesday morning. Mademoiselle Renée had only eight pupils in her class, and Mademoiselle Davidée nine. Nearly all who did come lived in the houses which clustered round the church, or else in those which formed a square on the bluish slope to the right of the school. The assistant had noticed, when she brought the little ones into room Number II, that Mademoiselle Renée had put on her best clothes, and was very excited.

"Have you given me back all the corrected compositions, Mademoiselle?"

"Oh, yes."

"And is all the needlework in the drawer in my room, next to the mineral specimens?"

"Yes."

"Very well. I am going to see that you have not forgotten to put them in the proper place."

At nine o'clock there was a ring at the street gate. Generally, when the charwoman had left

the school, Mademoiselle Renée sent one of the pupils to answer the door. She went herself, and a moment later, hearing a man's loud voice answer Mademoiselle Renée's veiled soprano, Davidée was almost sure that the headmistress was receiving the Inspector. She was not mistaken. The sound of running steps, and the noise of footsteps crunching the sand, the quiet, continuous movement of a bicycle making a tiny rut came through the open window with the sound of voices.

"Yes, Mademoiselle, I am terribly warm! What dust! What heat! But, really, your Ardésie is an oven!"

"I should not have dared to say it, sir, but I have thought so for six years."

"Six years!—in Ardésie! You asked to stay on?"

"No, sir. Would you like some refreshment?"

"No, Mademoiselle, I never accept anything; I am at my work. But all the same, although I come from the south, I have never suffered so much at home as here. This is your schoolroom? Please pass on—after you."

The declamatory scanning voice belonged to the southern species, and one listener made a forum for him. The entrance into the big schoolroom was noisy.

During this time Davidée was dictating a page from a handbook on civil instruction to the little ones. It was a pleasure to hear through the partition and door which divided the two rooms, the quietest notes of that paternal bari-tone, asking the pupils questions—the timid answers were ignored—and congratulating child

and mistress. "Quite right, this difference between lepidoptera and diptera! Four wings, two wings! Natural history makes us love Nature. Tell me how you separate oxygen in water from hydrogen? Splendid! That is a coming housekeeper, I am sure, who will be able to explain the phenomenon of ebullition. What is her father's profession, Mademoiselle?"

Mademoiselle Renée replied in her trained falsetto, "Pig-dealer, begging your pardon, sir."

"Very well. The spelling is not very satisfactory, but the memory is good. That is the master-power, Mademoiselle."

"Yes, sir."

"One of the joys of life!"

"Yes, sir."

"And one which you cultivate so successfully. Show me the rotative book of the daily work. You do not know what it is? I understand. I excuse you. I proposed that name to the Minister of Public Instruction, whom I know well, to designate what you, perhaps, would call the class-book or the rotation-book—I found rotative a vibrating word. It adds to the meaning—makes, as it were, a picture. It was my own invention, but the Minister said 'I regret!' Thank you, Mademoiselle. That is what I want."

Davidée, dictating in a careful voice, was watching for the movement of the brass knob on the door, and listening to the quick footsteps, increasing in sound, which told that the Inspector and the mistress were coming.

She had placed the folds of her dress so that she could rise quickly. The visit was prolonged. At a quarter past nine the assistant mistress

heard footsteps, but they were going away. And for ten minutes in the big schoolroom there was only giggling and whispering, with sometimes a penholder falling to the floor, from which both pupils and mistress concluded that the Inspector and Mademoiselle Renée were walking either in the yard or in the garden. At half-past nine they came in again, the Inspector first. He opened the door as if he were entering a cage of lions, with quick step, his head slightly bent, his eyes looking at the eyes of the wild beast. The wild beast was the assistant mistress—who rose. Having made himself known in this fashion, the Inspector stopped the magnetic current, looked at the deserted benches, and smiled at the nine pupils present. Then he became grave again, and sat down in a chair which a pupil from the big room brought in behind Mademoiselle Desforges.

“Let me look at this dictation.”

He took the book nearest him, and approved.

“A page from Souchet-Lapervénche? One of our best prose writers. I often recite from Souchet-Lapervénche in drawing-rooms. It produces a good effect. There is not enough punctuation, Mademoiselle. How can you expect a pupil to understand anything not punctuated? Do you dictate the punctuation?”

“No, sir.”

“That is wrong. Listen to this piece punctuated, children, and notice my comma ; recognise my colon.”

He began to recite, Mademoiselle Renée was admiring—Mademoiselle Davidée looked respectful and resigned—whilst the pupils looked at that curved mouth, whence came a voice

like a chorister reading, and at those fat shaven cheeks, and at that chin, elongated by a pointed tuft of beard.

The Inspector, who did not belong to the department, but was taking the place of a sick colleague, belonged to that race of men who are never tired of themselves. No matter where he was, he played more than his official rôle in order to prove that his talent went beyond what was required in his present position. His attitude was one of conviction. He had the direct loyal imperious glance, and some of the frequenters of the café at Auch had even said "Imperial." He was always thinking of that word. It was his "breach in the Vosges."

The Inspector never discussed any order, and the obedience he exacted seemed beautified by his own example.

Crafty, with rough manners, he had the habit of letting his eyes fall insinuatingly upon his subordinates as if to say: "You see—I am a good fellow. I can smile and protect you and can use to your advantage a little of that credit which makes people jealous of me, and may make them jealous of you."

But this look seldom went beyond these professional suggestions.

Some very pretty assistant mistresses here and there had understood that the Inspector was a connoisseur. But it was enough that he should be given credit for his tenderness, that he could provoke some blushing and astonishment; a mental refusal gave him a feeling of triumph as he assured himself that no one should ever catch him making love to a subordinate—and he spoke the truth. All his severity was for

conscientious scruples. He saw personal insult in timidity ; and personal insult in respect for any authority not the State.

He liked his work, which allowed him to see some of the life of the country, and "those people of different races and all equally French." He was nice in pronouncing this formula, and it was to this that he owed at this moment his position as substitute for "his dear colleague prevented."

When he had minutely examined the different books, individual and otherwise, and had criticised the meaning of two maxims from the book on "Civic Moral," and declared that Mademoiselle Birot seemed an idealist, and asked the children some questions, he said :

"Mademoiselle, I have made the head-mistress confess. Now it is your turn. Will you come out with me ? We shall be more free to talk in the garden."

"Must I accompany you, sir ?" said Mademoiselle Renée.

"It is not necessary," he said.

The Inspector and the assistant mistress went in silence from the schoolroom to the garden, and the official, casting a glance to his bicycle to make sure that no one had touched it, sat on the little low wall dividing the fruit and vegetables from the school, and stretching out his arms and lowering them again, he signed to Davidée to sit down on the other side of the gate. She remained standing, about three paces from the Inspector. He signed again to her, and the odour of perspiration escaped from his clothes. He frowned, gazed at the sky above Davidée's head and said, relishing his words, "I should

not like to distress a young assistant mistress who requires confidence in the future, but I must warn you about several faults which have been found with you."

"Mademoiselle Renée?"

"I said 'have been found.' Do not aggravate your case by accusing your superiors. We have more than one way of knowing what is going on in any one of our schools. I will not speak at length on the misplaced familiarities attributed to you."

"Conversations, perhaps, familiarities, no. I will not be spoken of like that!"

"Oh, Mademoiselle, the expressions may have been misused; I have the right, and should have it, to criticise your private conduct."

"Make use of it, sir, but please do not judge without hearing me."

"Precisely. I have no intention of questioning you on that point—but I repeat I could do it."

"But do it then!"

"How quick you are! You are so young. Well, no, Mademoiselle, I refuse to discuss principles of personal morals adopted or practised by any of my mistresses. Except in cases of scandal, I do not interfere in the south, and I shall not do so here in the north."

He left off looking at the first white clouds which began to move above the wall in front of him, lowered his imperial face, and turned his eyes, which were of the same black, mixed with blue, as his hair and beard, upon the young girl, who was expecting this movement; and she did not avoid this glance, destined to make her tremble. One could look very deep down into Davidée's eyes. She stood erect by the gate,

her hands in the pockets of her spotted cotton apron, which covered her bodice and skirt. A sun-ray shone on her from the left and made her hair seem nut brown.

"What I complain of is a professional failing ; your attitude towards the Curé of Ardésle."

"I beg your pardon, sir, I do not quite understand your accusation. Only once have I put my foot inside the Church for——"

"I know it, you are telling me nothing new."

"I was brought up in a family where religion was scarcely ever practised. I do not judge my father and mother. If they had brought me up in another way, I should tell you. I should have no fear in telling you."

A quick short smile spread over the severe mask.

"Bravo, I like sincerity. But, you see, according to your own acknowledgment, you do not know if you are right or wrong in abstaining entirely from confession?"

"That is so. I have not had the time to think about it"

"I hope you will never have it. It is but a vain question."

"They taught me so—super-rational!"

"Exactly! Ah, you have followed Mademoiselle Hacquin's lectures; she is one of our great thinkers, and yet from an Elementary School. But, precisely because you have not taken any side, you are led away. Innocently, I believe, but it is grave. For you set an example, Mademoiselle! You were with your pupils and in your official capacity when you, some weeks ago, had a long conversation with the Curé at the cemetery gates."

"For a moment only. I was thanking him. I loved the little girl who died."

"Your pupils were wandering about the lanes, alone."

"Oh, sir!"

"Yes, alone, when the noise of a carriage drew you from oblivion, from your conference with the priest. Further—let me finish, I beg—further you were carrying under your arm an enormous prayer-book."

"Oh, sir!"

"Very provoking."

"I would have preferred a small one. I have no other."

She stopped a moment, and Daddy Birot's temper—not an easy one—appeared in his daughter's face, in the tone of her voice, in the movement of her hands which shook the red-spotted apron.

"So you would forbid me to go to church, if I wished to go?"

He answered, laughing disdainfully. "No, Mademoiselle! Liberty——"

"Anyhow you would forbid me to take a prayer-book? The only one I have? Have I not the right to pray for my dead, as others do? I beg you tell me clearly what you call my duty, sir, so that I may do it, if possible. I ask you to state it clearly."

It was the Inspector's turn to make a moment's reflection. He seemed to be interested again in the clouds which were rising and crowning the house, as with an imposing glacier.

"I will lay no finger on liberty, Mademoiselle. I should be giving the lie direct to my whole

public life. What I request, or what I advise you to do, which is almost the same thing, is not to walk about with a big book, a book which is a witness in itself, and to talk as little as possible with the Curate, and if there be a Vicar, with him also. Do you understand? There are different shades. I cannot point them out to you. No, I see you are determined not to understand. They say you are intelligent, and you are. Take care not to judge things too independently."

With a movement of his heavy thighs he jumped to the ground from the low wall on which he was sitting—and again adopted the tone, as he called it, of a man of the world, asking the assistant mistress to relate the principal scenes of the strike. The head-mistress, who was watching him, came out to accompany him as far as the road. He made very cordial promises to Mademoiselle Renée to get promotion for her. His expressions were less precise when he assured "an assistant mistress still a little too independent, but full of good will, and who had a future in the teaching profession" of his particular kindness.

Davidée felt that she was condemned with short respite.

"Well dear," said Mademoiselle Renée, when they were alone, "are you satisfied?"

"Delighted."

"I have done all my possible for you. We have had some misunderstandings. Shall we let them be forgotten?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle!"

Davidée took her evening class, thinking of

what she had heard in the morning. She could have no doubt about the accusation of which Phrosine had spoken, nor about the disgrace which would be the certain result of the Inspector's vague promises. She had enemies, she, the young girl who had not been obliged to join the Normal School for her livelihood as so many others do, but had been driven to it by some maternal instinct, some gentle leaning towards the education of children, and, above all, the desire to serve. She said to herself, "I will not be shut up, or, as Maieul says, 'embocagee.' I shall get out of these difficulties by facing them and not fearing them. First of all, I shall see the Curé this evening, who, perhaps, will be questioned about this in any case. If I am reduced to these wretched means of defence, he can bear witness to the remarks we exchanged. It disgusts me to be thought so weak, so low, that I should undertake not to meet in a village street either a Curé, or Maieul, or Phrosine, or any other, no matter who, of the excommunicated, a list of whom will be dictated to me!"

Davidée's cheeks were nearly as red as her lips, when after six o'clock, putting her white bell-shaped cap on her head, she went to pay a visit to the mother of one of her children, who lived opposite the Church. She stayed some time, without saying why. The widow found the young assistant mistress very amiable. She talked and explained her business of washer-woman, which she began when she was fourteen years old, and which still, although she was nearly sixty, chapped her hands.

"The water in the wash-houses lays hold

of you more than you would think. She who begins a washerwoman ends a washerwoman. The women who dip the linen into the rivers at least talk with the stream. They say, 'How you gallop, you ruffle like lace,' and much else besides. But here with holes in which the water never gets warm and does not know what running means, the trade is not so gay. It is not lively enough for young girls, although at first——"

Davidée knew what to answer because her heart was attentive. By words and signs and a little passing sympathy, the woman understood that sudden tepidity disappears in the winter.

The girl, pleased at being liked, waited to the end of the prayers, for which the Curé of Ardésie pulled the bell, and which he recited himself at the golden hour, about five o'clock in summer and after five o'clock in winter. You could hear from the widow's house the responses of the people praying to God to bless their rest, to make it a means of energy and health, to drive away the enemy who takes night to himself as his own.

Through the open door, it was not only warmth that entered, and the air laden with the scent of hay, of marsh-land and bakery; but also the picture of the Virgin Mary and the Child, painted on the Church window.

Davidée looked at the three raised fingers of the Child, and she felt pleased, without acknowledging it to herself, at being there, so close to this saving action, and in its immediate protection. Never before had she noticed that there was a stained-glass window in the Church

at Ardésie, where the glorious Mother, powerful through the Child, was represented.

Suddenly the tone of the window changed, the Abbé had blown out the candles, men and women came out ; the men with that decided face which believers have in countries of differing religions.

The Curé was no doubt putting straight some of the chains and hanging up the bell rope. He came out a moment after the last person, turned the key, looked at the sunset which was of a magnificent purple, and lowering his eyes, was stupefied and frightened at seeing Mademoiselle Birot standing before him. Some witnesses were looking on from their doors. The assistant mistress purposely articulated her words distinctly so that she could be heard some way off. The Abbé bowed.

"Sir, do you remember the conversation I had with you, by the cemetery wall the day that the little Le Floch was buried?"

The Curé laughed loudly: "I could repeat it word for word, Mademoiselle, and the lesson would not be long. three sentences!"

"It seems that that is enough to denounce a teacher as a clerical. But I have no intention of allowing this. Will you write down the sentences in which I told you how I loved *my* little pupil?"

"Certainly."

"Thank you."

"That is all I wanted to ask you."

She turned to go. At this moment a woman entered the village ; she was covered with dust, and was walking with effort, dragging a child along through the dust who could not keep up with her. On the other arm the woman carried

a pot hanging on a string. She went slowly between the houses. The child breathed again. She drew attention to the tired dog which was following them.

"How dirty he is!" she said.

The mother shook her, and looked round.

"Not so dirty as some people! Come along, you little jade!"

She cursed. The little bit of a child laughed and re-echoed the curse.

They disappeared.

The Curé turned to the Church, and murmured beneath his breath: "My God, thou hast made thyself a prisoner, for the sake of those; and they do not know!"

There was silence. The people dispersed. Hands were raised in salutation. Some of the neighbours stood at the doors gossiping in the glow of the setting sun, which was going down rapidly.

From the Green Note-Book the same day.—"I do not believe, but I will not allow any state of mind contrary to religion, to be forced upon me, with the obligation of remaining always in that state. I am hurt, humiliated even, for the teaching profession, and my dignity is offended, in other things beside the proximity of moral misery, and a meeting with Maieul Jacquet! That man, who will have nothing to do with the large book, and who tolerates the small one, will make me do everything except what he wishes. I have made up my mind. I know in what defence I am going to trust. If I do not succeed, I shall give up my career. Meanwhile this hypocritical force has led me to the open prayer book. I have read half of the prayers used at

Mass, and the Office of the Dead. It is good to be buried with the words so full of compassion, of dawn and of pardon. It partakes of a nobility of which I do not see enough. The Inspector will not hinder me from seeing more if I wish.

"I still remember the words that the Curé said to me about the secret of peace with the world, and gladness. He said 'The solution of the social problem lies in the development of the Supernatural.' That is beyond my understanding. Who knows? I am astonished at the depth of love of the people which seems to be stored up in that priest's heart. The strike is nearly ended. I know nothing about the terms. But the hatred? All the causes of the strike still remain and are working. Only the pretexts are suppressed. Week by week the declaration of peace is postponed. What a lesson is life among the workers for a girl like me, worried at first by the little, which later on means so much. Yes, I would not give up my situation, among the stones, for a class in a town. Here I am in the midst of the life of the people, and I do not leave it, I am not distracted by it, and I see the same wretchedness in myself, that I see in their daughters whom I have to teach, and make again in my own image. And the image guesses that it wants change."

June 20th, 1909.—"A letter from Phrosine! I hardly hoped for it any longer. I thought that weak and violent creature, whom nothing has raised, quite lost to me; neither faith, nor tenderness, only her duties were her prop. That is too little when one does not believe in another life. What a mistake that neither her parents nor her school reformed this clinging nature, so

tempted and so tempting, but so open, or gave any ideals, or rules to this seeker after pleasure, who could have loved justice. She writes from Vendôme."

Phrosine's letter.—"Mademoiselle Davidée, It is I who write. You separated me from a man I love, and I owe you a grudge for that, and I still feel hostile at times, but I must write to you, because there is no one else to help me. At first I lived in Orléans. You will understand what I mean. I slept at hazard, in the suburbs, not often on charity; I took my food in the taverns where men drink, eating to excite thirst. I asked them all, do you understand? *all*. 'Have you ever met Le Floch—Henri, a big man with a beard—working in the mines, or in the woods?' They laughed; they said things which I leave you to guess. Yet indeed there were some nice ones among them. I looked like you, with more fire in my eyes and on my tongue. I told them 'I am looking for the father to find the son, who is *my* son; tell me. It is not safe to interfere with mothers who are defending their children. Tell me!' And they answered. 'Perhaps we have seen him, but work means arms, legs, and eyes, and not always names. Le Floch? Henri? I don't remember him. For instance, I do remember some bearded men. How old was yours? Forty. Well in 1904—or in 1905—in a timber yard, I did work with a bearded man about thirty-five—but it was not in the Orléans Forest. We were then working in the Vendôme Forest. He talked but little. That's right. He drank heavily' 'Then it was he. He looked rather like a lion who kept

Monday too often. Search for him . . . ' From village to village I came to Vendôme whence I am writing to you. And yesterday, after I had questioned several men, a man, quite young, came to my hotel, from the Vendée country. I cannot hide from you that he kissed me. I am not you and I had no money, and no courage. And talking in the hall he said to me—'I have met him! Le Floch? Yes, three months ago in the forest of Vouvant, in Vendée, and the finest you have ever seen. Something like you, if you were a forest'— 'Don't talk rubbish. Henri, are you sure? He had a boy of fourteen years old with him?' 'No.' 'So much the worse!' 'He only said— "I have a boy whom I have taken out of the poor-house." 'It is he!' 'Wait a little, "I have a boy for whom I have found a situation." 'Where?' 'He did not say—he only said: "At first the boy gave me his wages, and now he won't, it is disgusting." I left my friend in the lurch; he made a scene with the hotel keeper and I started for the Vouvant Forest and the Vendée. They say that it is far away from here, and near the sea. I will write to you if I find him; or if I am starving, because you got me into this misery. Send me a little money for the journey. Thanks all the same for having seen me off the day I left, and for having carried half the basket. If you could carry half my heart, you would soon find which is the heavier. Good-bye, try to be happy.

"PHROSINE."

June 30th.—"Another letter to-day. Not from Phrosine, but from an old schoolfellow, from the school at La Rochelle. She writes from

Rouergue. Why Rouergue? Of course she can say on her side: 'Why Ardésie?' and she begins by saying: 'Perhaps you remember,' as if she were not sure of my remembrance. But I do remember very clearly that weak, tender daughter of fishermen of La Rochelle; we used to call her Elise, because of the Elise in Esther. 'Is it you, dear Elise? O thrice happy day, etc.' because she was born to be a confidante. Those who trusted their secrets to the ivory casket would never regret having done so. Words fell upon her mind like drops of rain in the water; no trace remained of what had mingled with her thoughts, or of what she had learnt, and we sought her, although she did not return our confidences. We did not know if she had any secrets, and doubtless she had none that were her own. Years passed by and to-day it is she who confides in me, and asks my protection. I thought she was a Christian, at all events she had the regrets and aspirations of one. She said to me one evening: 'Do you never pray, Davidée?' in a tone which led me to believe that she knew the way up above better than I did—and now she asks the same question; she has already heard (and through whom?) about my misunderstanding with the School Inspector or rather with Mademoiselle Renée Desforges, and my doings in Ardésie, and she asks me simply: 'How are you getting on? Is it true that you have succeeded in getting sufficient freedom to make people recognise your right to be a Christian woman in your private life, and not to be anti-Christian in your teaching? I suffer from much contradiction on these two points, and I want

some one to help me. And how many others, silently fulfilling their career of devotion in the schools amid worse trials, are waiting for a draught of fresh air in which their souls may breathe! I am delighted to learn that you have been able to make your rights respected better than I, and let me add, dear Davidée, that it surprised me; I did not think our minds agreed so well—etc.’

“I answered clearly. I said I was not responsible for the village gossip, multiplied by the commentary of my fellow workers or pupils.

“‘I have had some small difficulty which has not yet been solved, but I count on it ending honourably. I have no method; I have no advice to give, and I have no confidences to offer; I have not that faith of which you speak.’ I hope she will not return to the subject.”

Eleven o'clock in the evening. — “The letter has gone. I saw the green linen bag on the postman’s shoulders and the postman on his bicycle, and my answer is travelling on towards Le Rouergue. I am sorry, the state of suppressed irritation in which I am has made me cruel. And cruelty to souls is the most cruel of all. I think of these suffering souls, like hers who came to me, hunted and spied upon, who dare not light a fire in the night for fear the flame and light smoke rising should betray them. They are better than I am; but the first causes of their suffering and my anger are not very different. I ask that my dignity should be respected, they are anxious for their belief. We are both offended by the same proceedings.

“ I open my window, I see distinctly low shapes in the grey night. Little or nothing can be named with any degree of certainty ; are those round, smoke-coloured things, in front and to the right, bushes or houses ? Were I not so well acquainted with them in daylight, I should not be able to say. The idea comes to me that even for ourselves we are often like people looking out into the night, and that I have never seen my soul in the light of day. It moves in a way I do not understand.”

CHAPTER XII

BLANDES WITH THE GREEN SHUTTERS

BLANDES with green shutters! When Davidée awoke very late on the morning of the 31st July in the room where no one except her had lived, where the flowers picked for her, and dying for her, and shedding their perfume of the "lande," wrapped her in memories on arrival, she would not at once call the servant. At the sound of the bell mamma would come the first, that mamma who Davidée guessed had already done her hair, the little white chignon made firm on her head by the same old comb of light tortoise shell, that mamma who was growing smaller and smaller, and who was surely in the next room watching, among all the familiar sounds of morning, for the unaccustomed, the longed and dreamed for cry, which would make her hasten.

"Mother, I am awake!"

No, not immediately. She got up first, carefully put on a skirt, dressed a little, and opened the window, drawing up the venetian blinds through which the light burst warmer and warmer in twenty stripes on either side.

"It must be more than eight o'clock," she thought, "and we were in the schoolroom at this hour, the day before yesterday in Ardésie!"

The window she opened, the north window,

looked on to the coast of the bay, without beach or down. You had to bend to see the muddy sea. There was only a marsh in front, which became meadow land, and slightly rising far away was lost in the mist of the horizon. Neither the trees, nor the roads, nor houses occupied an important place in this country by the sea. Grass there was, brown up to where the great winter tides reached, and green beyond, spread out like a never-ending fan. Open, eyes! Recognise your youth, which is there rising from the reeds and slopes, coming with peals of laughter! Davidée had promised herself great joy on this return, at the first greeting to the landscape of her childhood. She had gone through it several times, but this morning, in spite of the sun, and the clouds moving over the grass and still tender corn, she remained insensible; she was surprised, and made the discovery that her heart was wholly with the life yonder, down in unfertile Ardésie, with its children, its annoyances, and perhaps with the song of Maieul who had changed his country the better to withdraw from Phrosine's love. It was as if she saw the flower wither in her dress.

"Good morning, dear! Good morning, dear!"

Mother Birot had come in, she kissed the child, she stood a little way off to see better how she looked. All the disillusion had not had time to leave the young girl's face and eyes; a mist still remained which was clearing off, but the mother had seen it.

"Are you ill?"

"No, not at all, delighted to be back at Blandes! Is father better?"

"You are tired from night travelling."

"I have just waked myself up. From two till eight is a good sleep. No, I am not at all tired, mother."

"Then you are worried? Has any one annoyed you? Have you quarrelled with the headmistress? Have they not enough consideration for you? Is that not it? I guess it; those people in Ardésie have made life difficult for my child! They do not understand what a treasure they have. My poor dear, why did you leave me? I understand everything! Tell me what they have done to you?"

The assistant mistress had smiled; she had seated herself opposite her mother, in the daylight; she had taken those dear, thin hands in her own, hands which trembled at every heart beat; she showed the joy and real tenderness and gratitude which were in her; she told her in her own gay, quick way about the distribution of prizes, the leaving, the farewells without emotion to Mademoiselle Desforges, about the journey from Ardésie to Nantes, and from Nantes to Blandes, in the night. The mother, without interrupting her, and simply not to put off the pleasure of words of welcome and love, kept on murmuring.

"You are even prettier! Your lips are a little pale, Davidée, but how full of spirit! More than ever! How kind they are! Your pupils are lucky. I believe you are getting darker. What a lot of hair you have! More than when you were younger! What coils of it! Just like a statue in the Museum. And you have not yet done it! Ah, what a pretty girl is mine!"

However, when the story began to flag a little, she was worried and stopped it, by asking again :

“What is the matter? Tell me the secret? You are not quite the same girl who left me at Easter.”

Davidée would rather not have told so soon about the Inspector's visit and the incidents which brought it about ; she had thought to let some days pass and to choose the moment in which she would speak to her father. But her mother's impetuous tenderness would brook no delay ; her imagination gathering too often a proper subject to dwell upon, would have invented, on the slightest suspicion or a shadow of difference in the eyes or the smile of her child, twenty stories, and the little body pent up in the village would have worn herself out in dreams and tears if her child had refused to tell her all. It would be better and less dangerous to disturb her peace by telling the truth. As soon as Mother Birot understood the pressure to which they were subjecting her daughter, she said :

“ I should give in, because it is not a question of housekeeping, but you are like your father, you put your dignity into politics. We must tell Birot.”

“ To-day ? ”

“ Yes.”

She was once more the woman of decision, ordering without noise and with an air of submission all that had to be done in the house.

“ However, the day is worse chosen than you could imagine. I did not reckon on your arriving last night ; I had put flowers, so that

there should be witnesses when I went to your room, to tell me, 'She is on the way, she is coming; we shall be still fresh when she comes,' but I did not think of such haste. Listen, this very morning the doctor is coming."

"Is my father worse?"

"No, but he must be feeling very bad for he does nothing. It is sad when an intelligent man rests. My husband is killing himself with drink. His fingers make more journeys than he wishes; his head trembles on his shoulders. He still tries to occupy himself with business, but he takes longer to do less."

"Poor father!"

"But his brain is good, you know! He is feared as he was in his youth, and he is more terrible; only he has more enemies; there is no longer a leader to overthrow, but there are troops of them watching him die or get weak, and he feels it. I tell you, it is terrible. The house is divided between my silence and his anger." She added, however, her lips, usually compressed, scarcely showing the inward smile.

"But with me he is more gentle than he used to be."

They talked for a few minutes, when the door bell over Davidée's window announced the doctor's arrival.

"Come, dear."

In the work-room, with cretonne of an oriental design and woodwork of match-boarding, Birot was dozing when Davidée entered.

"Oh, my dear!"

His face became purple, and two tears streamed down his cheeks, showing how prematurely weak he had become. The quarry

master had risen ; he kissed his child, leaning his heavy head first on one cheek and then on the other ; he took his daughter by the shoulders and hugged her like a bear, saying :

“ You are going to make me better ! They did not tell me that you had come home. Why they did not . . . ”

At that moment the door opened again, and Madame Birot came into the room followed by the doctor.

“ Villain ! ” cried Birot. “ What does he want ? ”

Birot, whose face had become purple, refused to receive the doctor. He looked at him mockingly and told him to go away ; he showed him the door with outstretched arm , he could not utter his words ; his lower jaw dropped, disobedient to his will, which seemed to control his features one at a time.

Suddenly he burst into laughter, fell back on to his cretonne-covered armchair, and regaining the use of his jaw, which strained his throat muscles, said :

“ Now, my daughter, you will see how little these gentlemen really know ! You want to cure me, doctor ? You came because Madame Birot sent for you ? Yes, I understand. She has explained my diseases to you ? I have several. But what she has already told you will shorten your visit. Come, what do you prescribe for me ? ”

The doctor, who had a red beard, hard and trimmed like a sheaf of corn, and was a patient man with the patience of his peasant blood and with that other patience acquired in his profession, answered slowly.

"First, I must examine you, M. Birot."

"Very well!"

With a precise movement, just as if he were breaking a stone, the Mayor of Blandes took off his collar, opened his shirt and unbuttoned his waistcoat.

"There's the chest!"

And he looked at Davidée over the doctor, who was bending down to auscult the invalid, to let her see that he was obedient only because of her.

"Well!" he said, when the examination was over. "What do you advise, doctor, what do you want me to do? I know it already; my wife whispered the prescription to you. 'Give up drink.'"

"Just that."

"And give up living!"

"On the contrary, you would live longer."

"Without a motive, or pleasure, or friends! Listen, I scraped for forty years to make my fortune. I worked harder than my comrades; I was wiser, I was also helped by an economical wife. . . ."

It was the first time that he had done his wife justice in public. She stood silent in the corner of the room and made a sign of approval to her daughter, their judge.

"My companions in the quarry, my workmen, all drink," Birot continued, "and I may not? I, who am rich. Well, what must I do?"

The young doctor, nervous because of Davidée, sat down and rubbed his knees with his hands, his body swayed to and fro, he made a grimace full of expression.

"There are many things, M. Birot, which an intelligent man like you can do."

"What are they?"

"You can read."

"What?"

"Anything you like. Novels . . ."

"They bore me, they are all about a world of which I know nothing."

"Newspapers then."

"They are all alike"

"Then popular works of scientific . . ."

"I don't understand them. You are wasting your time, doctor. I was born for the Quarry, to order workmen, to get rest afterwards, drinking with them, not reading. My daughter reads for me; I drink for her, that's how life goes on."

He began to laugh again, thinking that his answer had hit the mark

"Garden a little," the doctor went on, "a garden like yours . . ."

"After an hour of it, I am done up."

"Then travel, spend your money in travelling,"

"I have tried it."

"Yes," said Davidée, "we went to Biarritz in the long holidays."

"Yes, in first-class hotels, but she doesn't tell you how ridiculous I felt there."

"Nonsense; what an idea."

"You won't get me to do it again! I am a workman, a stonecutter, and I have the habits of a stonecutter; you cannot get over the fact that pleasures are very different, they exist in custom and also in the blood. Why do you not suggest that I should become a doctor?"

"Play at cards rather!"

"As soon as I lose a few pence at Manille I

feel as if I had lost my home ; that is also in my blood, economy, I cannot lead a society life, I cannot play, I cannot dance, I cannot speak or amuse myself as a society man does."

He stood up, heavy and solid as formerly ; his patience and good temper were finished. "Don't bother me with your remedies ! I am thirsty because stone is thirsty. Our business kills us, I shall die of mine, which drinks too much. I have talked enough. It is time to see my friends !"

"Wait a little," said Madame Birot, while Davidée was seeing the doctor out. "I want to speak to you."

"Later."

"About our daughter, who has been wronged."

"Then, that is a different matter. I never forgive anyone who touches my child."

Davidée came back again.

"What is the matter, dear ?"

"The Inspector of Elementary Schools . . ."

Birot, who bent himself double to sit down again, stopped half way, and gave her a side-way glance.

"I bet it is about a Curé ?"

"Yes, papa !"

"I don't like it—but come, all the same."

The girl sat on a chair facing her father and quite close to him. And he held her hands. She knew her cause was won. As she spoke, the father admired and loved this child of his, who resembled him so much, who was not afraid and who had held her own, who demanded freedom, and who spoke so well. His eyes quickened, his lips moved and let out a small oath, and Birot breathed, body and mind, and grew

younger in his anger. His debating faculties were exercised, the words he was going to say were reflected in his face, and he shrugged his shoulders; he stood up and began to tug at the ends of his big moustache, which would soon move up and down under the influence of the violent words he would utter in his loud voice, but to whom? He knew that; he had settled the business in his mind; he had prepared his case in his own way when he said, patting Davidée's cheek:

"Decidedly I shall not drink this morning, mother, let us have lunch early. I am going to see the Prefect"

"At La Rochelle?"

"Yes."

"Yesterday you could not walk for the gout!"

"I have not got it now."

Some unusual joy freed his movements, and his voice and the light of his eyes, so cloudy lately, brightened. When he left the house, with his broad brimmed felt on his head, and dressed in the thick tweed suit which was, summer and winter, his dress on all occasions of ceremony, with his red tie, and carrying his stick, his wife said to him:

"Biro, one could swear that you were going to a public meeting!"

"Exactly, and so it is!"

"Come, you won't go on foot! Tell Cadrotte to harness his mare; he will not refuse, he is under obligations to you . . ."

"My poor dear, he would think them paid off. Let me go——"

He had reckoned that starting at that hour, a little before eleven, he was quite likely to meet

on the road some vehicle, or at least a cart carrying eggs or mussels. And in fact an egg-seller came along and took up the heavy man as an extra. The horse trotted along like an ungainly colt following its mother, head, in air. At ten minutes to twelve M. Birot was shown into the Prefect's ante-room.

"Shall I announce M. Birot?" asked the doorkeeper.

"Drop the Monsieur. Say 'Birot is there!' I prefer being called Birot, quite short, when I am not paying polite calls."

"Just as you please."

The Mayor of Blandes was shown into the Prefect's room, and the Prefect, young and bald, went to meet him with outstretched hand, discreetly, without effusion; he did not trust himself, and was only really gay in showing his visitors out.

"My dear Monsieur Birot, I have only five minutes."

"That's quite enough, Prefect."

"Be seated. Have you come to ask for a harvest permit. You can have it."

"No."

"Exemption on account of a dead cow?"

He laughed—as befitted the important man that he was—about the fourth part of a laugh. Birot did not laugh.

"No, a permit for a teacher to carry a large prayer-book when she goes to the funeral of one of her pupils."

The Prefect's forehead wrinkled up to those sparse little hairs which still showed where his hair had grown.

"You are making fun of me, I suppose?"

"By no manner of means, I came to you because the teacher I spoke of is my daughter."

"Mademoiselle Birot?"

"Davidée, assistant mistress at Ardésie. She has been threatened. She must not be annoyed. I won't allow it, do you hear? I won't allow it!"

"But, dear M. Birot, that is not in my province. I can do nothing for you."

Birot, who had sunk a little too deep in the armchair to which the Prefect had pointed, rose, sat on the edge, with his hands downwards resting on his thighs. He looked at the official for a moment over his eyeglasses, which he had placed on his nose, just as he used to look at his opponents before answering them. He nearly always made them nervous, and his eyes added much to the fury of the words he was going to say. His hands grasped his legs, simply not to let anyone see how they trembled. The Prefect, on the contrary, leaned back in his cane-chair, and made a grimace as if he had a cigarette between his lips.

"Sir," said Birot in a voice restrained with difficulty, the jerks of which struck as it were the Prefect's chest and face, so that he withdrew slightly, "Sir, I am addressing you because you are our clerk——"

"Really! Clerk!"

"Perhaps I am not expressing myself well, but I know what I mean. You are an official clerk to get the people of our coast out of a difficulty whenever they want, and to plunge the others in deeper."

"That is a most simple idea, Monsieur Birot."

The Prefect's laugh displeased the stone-cutter, who no longer restrained his voice.

"I don't care a damn how simple it is, it is true! I address myself to you because you are at hand, and I am not able to address myself to others. What is Birot outside his province? No one, while here I am a power——"

"A man who has rendered great services, I do not deny."

"Services? No; I am a man who subdues men, who knows them in a different manner than you do, because he knows all their peculiar weaknesses, who sees how they live, who brings them to vote for him, and to vote like him. I first serve myself, then afterwards I am willing to serve you, but on condition——"

"I do not allow this kind of threat."

"That does not matter, I can carry out my threats. I tell you that the Inspector who has marked my daughter's name, must repair his injustice!"

"I cannot occupy myself with your business."

"Well, then, I am going to occupy myself with yours, understand that!"

Birot was standing, his arms stretched out to the official, who had also risen, stupefied and vaguely moved at seeing such angry eyes and nervous fists so close to him.

"Sir."

"I am going to destroy your township of Blandes! I am going to settle your administration! I shall proclaim your denial of justice, and tell how you treat the democracy!"

"Monsieur Birot, you are asking for the impossible."

"You, too, think I am old! You think I am worn out! They told you so, did they? Well, sir, it may be my last campaign, but I swear I will win it! I have the honour!"

He seized his hat, inadvertently put it on, and walked towards the door.

The Prefect touched him on the arm.

"I am very sorry to refuse you, but you ought to understand that I cannot *directly* give you satisfaction."

The Mayor of Blandes did not answer, shrugged his shoulders, and went downstairs.

He took away in triumph that adverb "*directly*." "How slow he was in bringing out his '*directly*,'" he murmured, as he went down the stairs. "How slow, I thought it would never come."

It was late in the afternoon, those tiresome hours when flies, wasps, and gadflies reap their invisible harvest in the air, had given place to the softness of the evening waiting for the wind, when Birot, whom no one had heard come in, approached the arbour where his wife and daughter sat at work in the shade. The gravel made more noise than all Blandes put together. The two women raised their heads, and their needles pointed in the air.

"Well?" asked Davidée.

Madame Birot asked nothing, and she it was to whom the big man spoke, breathless, chilled, wiping his face, but his eye clear, glancing quickly from one face to another.

"I don't want any doctor, mother; I still manage my Prefect like a young man!"

Then, stroking the young girl's cheek, "I am sure they will write to you, I should not be

astonished if they didn't tell you that to please them you must take, from now on, the reading desk prayer-book to funerals! I will tell you about it—I am going to get some refreshment."

He had, for thanks, a look from Davidée, which seemed to say, "Why, when you can command others, are you so weak towards yourself? Poor father, whose last days will be darkened by madness!"

The needles, together, pierced the white linen, and made a light noise in passing through the closely woven threads, and under the branches of the honeysuckle, moist with honey and eaten by green-fly, the conversation went on, slow and intimate for the first time between Madame Birot and her daughter.

"Then, mamma, you have never felt the want of faith?"

"Your father would have forbidden me to do otherwise than I did. He has his politics. I should have broken up the household. Besides, I am as much of a believer as one can be here. What do you call 'believing'?"

"To accept God and to raise oneself through Him above the life one leads, and to judge of it."

"I leave your father to judge of it, and my neighbours judge me, and my conscience. Is not your conscience enough?"

"No, it is so difficult without any fixed rules. When you did not know, did you ask advice?"

"Never."

"You evidently did not suffer like me."

A bee, half drunk with honey from the honeysuckle and holding a dead leaf between his legs, fell on to the linen. Davidée threw it on to the

ground with a quick movement of the finger protected by the thimble.

"I try to form consciences, my dear mother, and I feel that they are escaping me, that they die, like new-born children given to me to feed, and for whom I have no food. I have only the mother's pains."

"What are you saying? Don't you follow the programme?"

"Oh, mother, I follow it too well. I ignore everything else. I mistrust everything. I have just enough intelligence to see the difficulties, but not enough to solve them. I am tempted to believe and to pray."

"You?"

"And I remain uncertain and troubled. This does not make me good enough, nor wise enough, nor a true guardian, neither sister nor mother, yet my family is enormous, and cries round me. I ask why I was sent to these little ones so unprovided myself?"

"If your father heard you he would be very angry."

"Anger is no solution, mother, to these questions. It seems to me, that I get little lighted candles, yes, just like those you stuck on to a Naples biscuit for my birthday; nine years old, nine candles; ten years old, ten candles; and I do not breathe on them, oh! no, but they go out in my hands. And the smell of their dead smoke pursues me."

Madame Birot, who did not usually let herself be interrupted in her work any more than a spider, let her two hands fall on the dress turned up twice over her knees, just when she had begun to draw a thread.

"Davidée," she said gravely, "you are upsetting me, and I have a good deal of trouble, because I cannot go where you are going. I ought not. But I know quite well where you are going."

"I do not know myself, mother. But it is certain that I have no longer the same mind I had in my youth, no longer the sleep of Blandes."

The mother sighed, took her needle up again, and lowering her eyes red with long work, she said, "I would rather not talk about that. Leave me my sleep, which I call peace."

"I imagine peace like a breath of certainty, full, fresh, pure and easy; I have not got that."

"Let us speak of something else, Davidée, that is too much for an old mother like me."

They no longer spoke of anything. Never before had such words passed under the trellis work of the arbour, never had they been said in the white house, and the neighbouring houses did not understand the meaning of them.

From the Green Note-Book. July 31st.—"My father was to have told us about his interview with the Prefect during dinner. But fatigue and other daily reasons, alas! permitted him only to make a trial of it—bits of sentences, words without any connection making no sense when placed together. The most painful thing is that my father is aware of this falling off and of its causes, and that there is no remedy. My mother made herself talk with me, to fill up the silence, but each trial made him angry, as he only saw an interruption in her efforts, and want of politeness. He called me to witness. I suffered at the thought that this, my first evening, had

been so longed for, dreamed of by my mother, as one of the great joys of the year, as a compensation, a consolation for the ordinary evenings. At eight o'clock mother went upstairs to be sure that my father was going to bed, that he had not conceived the intention of joining those he called his friends at the cross-roads of Blandes. I went out. It was still light and warm. The mothers were in their homes, and passed to and fro in the half darkness of the passages and open rooms, I saw the white soup-tureens they were carrying. or the pillows they placed on the bolsters. Young people and old were in the front of the painted houses, either sitting or standing ; nearly all of them sad. My passing by caused the groups, who were waiting for the night, to look up and say the same words. I was greeted here and there by a little nod, but as if they pointed out to me, involuntarily and by instinct, that I was no longer one of them, no longer the companion or friend, and that I had lost my place in the town ! It would take time to regain it, and it would no longer be the same—I am different, education and absence have made a stranger of me.

“ I was better welcomed by the roads through the seaside grass—and by the paths which mark out the old curves of the shore. I found again their silence and their cracked surfaces and the light of the red moon which the setting sun throws on those which only belong to the sea for a couple of days in the year, but which the sea has preserved in the salt, and sown for many a day with her own vegetation. I saw the sea, but so far away like a plate of shining water which is not deep enough to form a wave,

eternally smooth and slashed with palissades as with black hedges on which the mussels cling and fatten. This picture has followed me. I saw its brightness only when I was young. To-day I thought, once there were on these coasts high waves, ships and tracks of ships, the noise of oars, and shade of sails, and ports and men who lived a life of adventure and danger. But the land is worn out; these travellers on the open sea no longer come, the water brings in only shapeless river boats pushed along by feet, and sliding along between the banks of mud. Little by little I imagined that I was bound up in the fate of this landscape. I felt its abandonment as a personal grief—no, I will not live there! I will not let the land invade me. I belong already to griefs which I will console, but which belong to life. And the thought came to me that I may love Maieul Jacquet. He has no education, but at least he is not deformed by the pride of a little knowledge. He is capable of courage, courage of the most difficult kind which men do not have when they believe themselves to be gods; he knows he is a man, he listened to a voice, that was mine and still more that of the dead child, and he took our lamentations for a duty. And in order to keep his promise he left the country. He must be a stranger there, just as I am here. He suffers—perhaps he is thinking of me. If I were sure of it, and if I married him, he would be my grown-up pupil; I should seek my way and we would go along it together; he would not hinder me if I wished to be better; he would trust me, yet I do not know if I should climb very high; but he would climb with me.

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August 5th.—"I have tried to read religious books here at home. How is it that there are such books in the library of a man like my father, who has anti-clerical ideas? How did they come among these three hundred volumes given over to the lumber-room? I did not dare ask mother about it, but I found two of them. Gratry is the most modern of them. And it suits me best. I find such a suffering faith, or better still a knowledge of the sufferings of those who seek, which attracts me. My condition is one of trouble, of contradiction, weak will, the fear of falling if I do not change, the disgust which goes before effort—extreme moral solitude. Contemporary masters of spiritual life have understood my anguish. And it is here that I learn it—in my father's home!

August 6th.—"My mother, who has the gift of penetrating into the valleys of the mind, and who has lost, or never had the taste for heights, has made me tell her about my life as teacher in detail. She forgets nothing, she classifies names, dates and descriptions in silence; she guesses what I do not tell her. This morning we were coming back from the neighbouring village; my arm is still tired with the weight of the basket full of provisions, vegetables, eggs and the fowl I carried. We were talking about me, for I have been her great subject for thought for twenty-three years. She has lived through, by the power of love in her, nearly all the unknown in my life, the years at the *école normale*, and above all the first months at Ardésie. I remarked her joy at having me near her, and her poor little white face expressed so much fulness of joy, as she walked, having my

shadow over her, my breath, my voice and my soul bending over her. A tidal mist was falling warm and fine, but she did not notice it. She enjoyed having her hands free, and rejoiced that we were two, and I did not think that the thought of the future entered into her touching happiness. I was mistaken. She was thinking about my future. As we came near the school at Blandes, at the entrance to the village through which she was accustomed to pass in silence, for fear of the echoes, she said to me,—

“‘You must marry, Davidée. Your father cannot live long. I could not protect you. Your brother hardly belongs to the family now, and you would have more trouble than kindness from him. But you are different.’

“‘That is your dream, mother, more than mine.’

“‘You would do what I did not know how to do, you would educate your husband.’

“‘How? With my alphabet and class books?’

“‘No, there is a strength in you for the good of others.’

“‘That is why I left you both; but I have seen my weakness in the trial.’

“‘I was very troubled by those words—‘a strength for the good of others.’”

From the Green Note-Book. August 14th.—

“Phrosine wants help. She writes to me: ‘Mademoiselle, I have found Le Floch; he is working in the Forest of Vouvant, which is very far from La Sologne. He saw me: he was afraid; he has not returned to the lodging-house where he used to go once a week to change his clothes and sleep in a bed. I know that he said

—‘She wants me to take her back—but if I find her here I shall leave the country.’ The child was not with him. I know the child is alive, that he has been placed on a farm—but where? Come and help me. It is not a very long journey. From what they say it is in Vendée. You will speak to Le Floch for me. He would not listen to me. If you do not come, my child is lost—my last. And I may tell you too that I have no more money, that I owe money to several people, and that I am at the end of my courage.’

“The letter is dated from a little village on the borders of the Great Forest of Vendée.”

Davidée hesitated. What service could she render? Would she be asked anything more than the payment of some baker’s bill, or a week’s board to a lodging-house keeper? What company would she meet? Why leave Blandes? As she still hesitated she remembered little Anna’s words—“I give you Mamma”—and after the Feast of Assumption she set out.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MEETING

THE Forest began only a little way off and filled out the whole horizon. It spread over the hills and the hollows as far as the rising ground in the distance, planted with old forest trees, from where the sea wind and the light of the setting sun swept on to the plain.

The sun was going down quickly. It was lower than the branches, and the colonnades of old tree trunks were covered with purple. What an admirable moment! The sun's warmth on the roots and mosses and the raspberry canes in the glade, those means of life brought to poor homes oppressed by shadow. Beyond the woods and borders of the village there was a plain, half stubble, half potato fields, and strips of Indian corn, the stalks of which did not hold the little tufts erect, and there was also a road, quite straight, cutting through the fields. In the winter, carts came this way, laden with trunks of trees, the tips of which bent down and wrote upon the dust. In the height of summer, when harvest had nearly finished, not a soul was to be seen on the long narrow road winding through the purple country. Two women were looking at the setting sun and watching from

one of the windows of the "Woodcutters" for a man who should come that way. The Saturday before he had said to the landlady, "Next Saturday, mother, get my two shirts ready, and a pound of bacon." And because of those words Phrosine and Davidée waited there with heavy hearts. For a quarter of an hour they had watched for the sun dying down and the figure of a woodcutter who would be coming slowly down the slope. At first he would be quite small on the dust, then he would come nearer and get bigger—and then they would see that face which they had not seen for so many years, and the man would speak and tell his secret, on which depended the future.

"You will let him sit down," said Phrosine. "When he has ordered his bottle and begun to drink, he will not be so rude to the people here as to go away without giving any reasons. He is a hard man, but harder with me than with others."

"Then I must show myself first?"

"Yes—you will appear on the stair. When he hears the steps creak he will think it is I, and he will half rise. Do not be afraid if he looks cross, his looks will be for me, not for you. He will see your white hands, and he will think, 'Those are not a washerwoman's hands,' and he will be nice. Perhaps he will be a little afraid of you."

"But what when I have told him that you are here?"

Phrosine trembled, and, still gazing on the distant road, said: "He will be angry, and perhaps all will be lost for ever."

She was bent, leaning for support on the

window frame, and behind her Davidée stood erect. The sun was red among the oaks, and its beams, no longer touching the plains, seemed like clouds above the forest.

"The wind will be hot to-morrow," said Phrosine. "It will be very bad for those who cut the last corn."

She was silent for some time.

"Suppose he does not come? My eyes are already as tired as if I had sewn the whole day."

"Do not look at the red sky. Stop in the room—I will let you know."

"No—I must see my fate as soon as he shows himself. Do you not see something there to the right of the forest?"

"It is a shrub, night changes the shape of things."

"He is afraid of me! M^e, whom he once so eagerly sought!"

Darkness descended, and things grew more like each other. Voices called here and there seeking men across the extended plain; and beyond that smoke rose from the houses, it was supper-time. The women were quiet—and there below them a young girl was seen in the narrow, hedge-bound road. Whence came she? She was waiting, trembling and grave, and turned towards the sinking sun. She leaned her hands on the field gate. And soon, on the other side of the hedge, a young man came without any haste stepping across the furrows. He was flattered at being waited for, and his faded, thin face reflected his content. The young girl, seeing him come nearer, half shut her eyes, as if for her alone the light, at this hour, was too strong. The extreme sweetness of her dream

enveloped her and made her smile and held her motionless. When he drew near, her two virgin hands, those two hands which took part in the dream of love, and thought of cradles, stretched out and opened like lilies over the hedge in the new shadow. As for him, he took no notice of them, he jumped over the gate, and with an impassioned gesture kissed the child; and some confused words from him and her were lost before reaching the window. Only the murmur of their voices rose and fell, and they went over to that side of the plain which is not crossed by roads.

Phrosine watched them with angry eyes.

"Oh!" said she, "she is happy—unfortunate creature!"

And almost directly Davidée saw the outline of a man detach itself from the shadow of the forest, and come down the hill.

"Some one is coming on the road."

The other did not answer.

"He is walking quickly. He has a stick on his shoulder, and a little parcel swings at the end of the stick. He is now near the cross, among the Indian corn."

"Observe what he does—if he bows by the cross it isn't he."

"He is passing it. He turns his head away—he has passed it. He is looking now this way towards the 'Woodcutters.'"

"That is he, go away; the time has arrived."

Phrosine had already withdrawn to the dark part of the room, and Davidée had hidden to the right, sheltered by the wall. Both of them went on watching him who was coming through the fading daylight, and when he was

quite near, they listened to the regular beat of his footsteps, the clatter of his big boots on the stone floor at the entrance, and the noise of the latch of the downstairs door, which, lifted by a heavy hand, knocked against the iron bar.

"Well, is my washing ready?"

"Yes, M. Le Floch; yes, surely, we have not forgotten."

"Bring me a bottle of white wine as usual. There is no one about?"

"You see, you are my only customer."

The women, in the shadow of the first floor room, did not move, for fear the floor-boards should give the landlady the lie. They held their breath. And they heard every movement that Le Floch made sitting down at the table. The woman uncorked the bottle. The man poured some wine into the glass and drank, and the noise of his drinking went up in the listening house. The glass was then placed on the table. The two coat sleeves rested on the wood. Le Floch must have looked at the wall at the end of the room: he breathed several times heavily, with his mouth open, from the fatigue of the day and the walk. The woman said, "I must go and do my work, you won't mind?"

A soft step was heard on the ground. A door opened and shut. The household of the "Woodcutters" seemed asleep for the night.

Then Davidée came down. The badly-jointed floor-boards creaked. From the shadow of the stairs, the woodcutter, by the light of the lamp hung in the middle of the room, saw a skirt trimmed with embroidery, and a little, pale hand holding the bannister.

The young girl stopped short, with beating

heart, then she came on downwards, reached the floor and stepped towards the man. He was astonished enough for the strength of his temper to accentuate and hollow his thin pale face. He was no longer like a lion. His features were regular, his yellow narrow beard fell on to his worn-out velvet waistcoat; his eyes, very blue, very hard, and not at all alarmed, asked "Who are you? Why do you come straight to me? Have I done you any wrong? What have you got to reproach me with, you who are not afraid of me?"

Davidée went right up to the table, and while the man's hand went to his round felt hat, the colour of dead leaves, she said,

"M. Le Floch, I am a friend of your wife."

Then the man's face became hostile. "Is she here then? I thought as much!"

"She has sent me to you and you are going to listen to me, because she forgives you everything and what she asks of you is just."

This brief reference to the wrongs, and this call to justice, and the youth of her who said these words, acted on the woodcutter's mind. An evil smile hovered over his thin lips.

"She does not want us to live together, I suppose?"

"No."

"She does not want a divorce?"

"No."

"So much the better, divorce is always a nuisance."

"She wants to know her son."

"Ah! that's another matter, we can talk about that."

"Here she is," said Davidée, withdrawing.

The man turned white, seeing her who had suffered through him.

She half laughed, awkwardly and against her will, but so that he should not be afraid of her, so that between them hatred should not be the first to speak. Then she was a woman, and in spite of everything, she remembered that she had once loved him. Upstairs in the darkness she had tied and smoothed her hair which surrounded her face, still young, bold and restless, and ready to change expression at the slightest sign from the man. Apparently timid, she took a stool and sat in the passage between the two rows of tables.

"It is some years since we saw each other," she said.

The woodcutter shook his head, to show that she must not hope to soften him.

"Just so, and then?"

"But I must explain something to you—my little girl is dead . . ."

"So much the worse."

"Our little girl—the one you never knew. She died on the fifth of May."

"This year?"

"Yes, just three months ago."

The man seemed to be thinking to himself. "Where was I then?" he said. "If I had known it, I should have sent a wreath. But when we are separated like this!"

"Exactly!"

"You are still working in the school house? I heard that from Flahaut of Ardésie and from Father Moine."

"Yes, but it does not bring in enough to live on."

"I am also poor. We were both made for misery."

"Perhaps. But I cannot console myself for the loss of my child, if the other be not given back to me. I was not always a good wife—we are as we are, Henri. Telling lies is not one of my habits, you know that, and there are things you can reproach me with—but I was always a good mother. Tell me, Le Floch, where is my son, that I may go and find him?"

In spite of his boldness, the man was not sure of his answers when she spoke of the past. He also had done wrong. But this living son who was still depending on him, and whose retreat he alone knew, was a subject which did not embarrass him so much.

"I see what you are after, Phrosine. You want to profit by the boy's wages?"

She said no, shrugging her shoulders.

"He is earning well—but it is not for you."

"I want him only, he can keep his money if he likes."

"Bah! you cannot deceive me—I did wrong in taking him away from the poor-house. They did not want to let me have him, just because he is big and promises well, and I look like a man, they say, who understands the duties of children to their parents. How many times I had to go, and what threats I used before they let him go!"

And the woodcutter's impudent laughter rang through the room.

"He was quite reasonable the first year; he helped his father to live. But now, he has changed his mind. He no longer gives me

anything. You would think he must be a bastard, money sticks to his fingers."

"In truth, that's not at all like you!"

The man shook his head and hatred was seen in the corners of his long thin lips.

"You would get the better of me, Phrosine, but you shan't get what I couldn't have. I shall not tell you where he is."

"And if I find him?"

"I will prevent your taking him away—there are policemen! You would be too pleased, you would find me very silly! I say no!"

"I beg of you, Le Floch"

"It is no good begging me, you know that."

She was just going to throw herself at his feet.

"Say yes, M Le Floch," said Davidée, coming out of the shadow of the staircase. "Tell her the farm where her son is, write on a page from my notebook that Phrosine is really his mother, and by way of thanks I will make you a present of this."

In the tips of her fingers she was holding a hundred-franc note, and she placed it on the table.

"By Jove! you have rich friends, Phrosine!" said the man.

He unfolded the note, closed his eyelids three or four times, perhaps to greet the visions which passed before his eyes, then said:

"Give me a pen. But I warn you you will get nothing from him. You women are making a bad bargain. He has a strong will."

Davidée opened her green notebook, tore out a page, handed her pencil to the woodcutter, and Phrosine, stupefied and panting for breath,

watched the movements of the heavy hand writing, "Maurice, farm servant at La Planche, near here, the woman who brings you this letter is your mother, Phrosine. We could not get on together, but she is your mother; you may obey her if you like. Your father, Le Floch."

It was Davidée who took the written page and placed it in the notebook from which she had torn it.

For a moment there was not a sound to be heard in the room in which the fate of several people had been bought and sold. The lamp hanging at the end of its long chain threw down its round light. Le Floch was the first to recover the full use of his mind. "I must not be late," he said, turning to Phrosine, "someone would be jealous."

There was a peculiar cruelty burning redly in his blue eyes. He felt he had alienated his son, he was having his revenge.

"She does not like her man to spend the night at an inn. It's funny, Phrosine, her hair is the same colour as yours—fox-colour."

She stood up. "Wolf-colour."

"If you like."

"Perhaps she is not so beautiful as I am! There is still some hope!"

She said it insolently, her arms crossed, and she was beautiful. It is true, her beauty was near its end, but rejuvenated by the excitement. The man looked at her, and not without pleasure. He recalled to mind his sweetheart, his bride, the days of love when the neighbours called Phrosine "the beautiful she-wolf," but he rose and giggling, said, "She is younger."

And it was finished between them.

Phrosine started back. "You are the same," she murmured, "you have not changed."

But she did not say it out loud, for fear the man should repent having signed the paper. He poured out another glass, and drank it off at a gulp, having first looked at Davidée, and said, "Your health!"

Then he called the innkeeper.

"Give me the things that have been washed, mother!"

"Here they are!"

He untied the handkerchief fastened to the end of his stick, put in the clean linen, and saluting Davidée with one hand at his forehead, and without looking at his wife, but seeing her in every drop of his blood, turned towards the door.

Then, having opened the door half way, and while the night-wind was blowing into the room, he said in a bitter voice, which hid his feeling, "Now I go back to the forest; you will not hear about me so often."

He went away. The sound of his footsteps echoed on the glass panes, getting more and more feeble, until at last it sounded like a finger tapping gently. And night came down like a silent tide of darkness and wind on the village with its fields. Davidée hardly slept at all. She was thinking, "Never before has any moral misery touched me so deeply, and the cause of it all is so apparent. The body of a young man and the body of a young woman have been attracted to each other. This attraction they called 'love,' and the time this love lasted, 'marriage.' Other temptations came—men, women, anger, idleness, poverty—and there was

no soul to withstand. What an end to what ought to have been eternal!"

In the early morn the two women, who left the still sleeping village, walked to the east along the deeply cut road, which, leaving the forest on one side, turns aside a little here and there round the little hillocks, and then retakes its direction again like a shaken compass. They said to one another, "Who will speak? We, you and I, are both equally unknown to him. Which would be better? To ask first at the farm at La Planche, or else to speak to him while he is out at work?"

"Always supposing that the father has not been lying."

"I do not think he has."

"You don't know the depth of his wickedness any more than you know mine."

"Why do you say that?"

"Oh! my poor girl! There are bad people in the world, and we belong to them, he and I. They used to call me the she-wolf, and they were right."

"The sun is rising. Here it touches the tips of the willows; the working day has begun. Ought we to turn down here?"

"Yes, the woman at the inn said—'When you see the wide meadows with the big trees, leave the roadway and follow the cart track which leads up to the pond of La Planche.'"

They followed the road where the winter ruts had hardened, in which seeds of different sorts had germinated and the spikes were bearing seeds. The fields were poorer than the others they had just passed; they made an elongated valley to the left, but slightly depressed, and the

two spurs from the forest marked it out and surrounded it. Nearly all were the colour of wheat or oats stubble. Some had not been cut yet ; they made red spots on the light slopes like a sand track in an oval circus.

In spite of the early hour the wind was dancing in the valley. The country smelt of fresh straw and plums. When they had gone about a thousand yards on the cart track Phrosine and Davidée discovered that a causeway, covered with bushes, stopped the plain, and that beyond that there was a pond fringed round with reeds, and near the pond, at a height not reached by the winter waters, a farm ; dwelling-house, stables, barns and sheep-folds were arranged round a square.

"That is La Planche," said Davidée.

And putting her hand up to the brim of her hat which did not protect her sufficiently from the sun, the assistant mistress looked round to see what was living and moving, either man or beast, in this long landscape.

Phrosine allowed herself to be led. She was quite weak and dumb and shut in her memories of the preceding night, or of the still older past, or in the fear that the minutes just coming would add to her fate.

"I see," went on the assistant, "quite at the end of the plain, in the border of forest shade, a flock of sheep in front of which goes the shepherd. I see, on the other bank of the pond, half way up, two reapers bent—one at the end of a plank, the other further up in the corn. To which shall we go ?"

Phrosine answered—"To the nearest."

So they drew near, crossing the causeway of

the pond—and they stood motionless at the beginning of the half-standing and half-mown harvest fields. The corn-reaper who came first—his body swinging in time and moved by the scythe, clad in an unbuttoned shirt and in trousers fastened to the shoulders by two strings crossed, was quite a young man, solid and rough—you could see it in the strength of his action ; he did not slacken his work because two passers-by stopped and waited at the end of the line of corn.

Were they out walking? Perhaps some of the townswomen asking the way to the fountain or to the village, or making enquiries about a house which would sell them some milk. He had seen others, here and there, again and again, wherever he worked. The knowledge of his superiority as a man, and his natural harshness disposed him badly for such encounters. He had seen the women approach, and immediately put his hat on his head with a movement of his hand. They could not see his face. He stood up at the end of the corn and seized the scythe handle near to the blade, turned it round and stuck it into the ground till the steel rang out, and the reaper said, "What are you looking at me for? I am working ; that is nothing new!"

"He has a hard look and a deceiving voice! He is like his father! It is Maurice, I am sure of it!"

Phrosine was just in front of him. She did not try to please him ; she remembered none of the words she had prepared thinking about this possible meeting ; but without a movement, without any skill, almost fainting, only alive in her agonised look, she studied each feature of

the face of the child become man—the forehead, the mobile brows, the short hairs making a kind of spur above the nose, the flat shapeless ears, the lips without any bow, even in repose, and above all those eyes, those blue eyes shining between the lids swollen with blood, those discontented eyes, which no doubt must bathe in a near spring of light and passion.

The young man turned towards Davidée, found her pleasing, and raising his shoulder asked :

“ How does she know my name ? ”

“ How do I know your name ? ”

“ Yes, who told you ? ”

“ I gave it to you. I am your mother.”

The reaper again shrugged his shoulder and looked disdainfully at the two adventuresses who were making him lose his time.

“ I don't know what you mean. I have no mother.”

And he turned away, lowering his scythe to begin work again. The other reaper was not far off, he came, and one heard the stalks being cut and the unbound sheaves being thrown to the ground.

“ Come, you women, get on. I have no time to spend listening to you.”

But the mother had already stepped into the wheat he was going to cut. Her eyes were wet with tears ; she clasped her hands and did not touch her child ; she begged him.

“ Your real mother, who has come from Ardésie. Your father must have spoken to you about Ardésie, where I live.”

“ No.”

“ Well, all the same he told me where you

were working, Maurice. I have had some difficulty in finding you. I am all alone now. Don't send me away. Don't be hard, like the others. I want you to know me, at least—and talk with me."

A voice, Davidée's, was heard a few steps behind.

"It is true, all that she has said—you may believe it."

Maurice Le Floch, afraid of being laughed at and observed by the farm labourer, who looked up while reaping, and could hear everything, repeated,

"Begone! Out of the wheat! If you, too, want me to give you the money I earn, I warn you that the other did not succeed."

"I don't want your money—I want you to know me, and when you know me to come and live with me, if it please you. I won't force you. I want you to love me."

She drew back because he had bent down, placing his two hands on the two short handles fixed to the long stick of the scythe.

"Come to La Planche, after midday—you can talk to Maître Ernoux who is my master."

With a circular sweep he struck down the ripe wheat. And going further into the harvest field, his head as high as the stalks, quicker than he came without looking round, he let the women go away. But he heard Phrosine weeping, and because he was young his heart was dreaming.

"I will go with you as far as the Ernoux house," said Davidée, who was trying to console Phrosine, "and afterwards I shall take the road back to Blandes, for they must be getting uneasy about me."

She was happy, but not so thoroughly happy as she had expected to be. She would have been glad to hear Phrosine say: "I shall not leave him. He will flee from me, but I shall gain his affection. He does not know what it is to have a mother. Ah! no, I will not touch his money, I am still young in spite of what Le Floch said. I will work. I will take him back with me."

Phrosine, however, was silent, disappointed at having found her son too much like his father; and Davidée asked herself, watching her walk along at her side, "Would she have come if she had known her son?"

The warm wind blew through the woods, over the plain where the harvest had been cut, and over the pond, where the rushes beat time against the water.

It was past two o'clock when the women, who had breakfasted in the village, went to see the farmer at La Planche.

Farmer Ernoux, who had been told about them, received them well, made them go into the room where the woodwork of three cupboards, a chest of drawers, and a bed shone in undisturbed peace, to do them honour. He was a short, fat man with the shaven face of a cunning lawyer, who had been asleep in the barn with all his people when Phrosine's appearance had made the dog bark. He had still some bits of straw in his hair. As a judge he listened to the story Davidée told him, and seemed to attach great importance to the document signed by Le Floch, and watched Phrosine all the time the assistant mistress was speaking.

Then he called Maurice, his second hand,

made him sit down in the light near the bed facing the window "Maurice," he said, "I believe this to be your true mother."

"That may be."

"She has a paper, and besides there is the likeness. It is not to be contradicted. It is not the eyes, it is not the forehead, it is not the nose, but there is something all the same."

"I say nothing to the contrary, but what does she want? I'm quite comfortable here. When I found my father I had to give him money at once. Now that I find my mother I say I will give her nothing!—nothing!"

"I approve of you, my boy! But all the same, if she is your mother, she has the rights of a mother. She can take you away to her own home."

"Oh! if that's all!"

"Yes, when you've finished your time with me. You have been hired, you are satisfied with me—I am satisfied with you, we must not separate."

"And then—shall I have my room in her house?"

Phrosine was not surprised at this bargaining. All her life she had been ordered about, and oppressed by men, by her father, by her husband, by her lovers, by her neighbours who hired her washerwoman's hands. But the mother had not imagined that her first interview with her son would be like this. Surely, she had reckoned that the child would help her to live. But above all, she had rejoiced in her maternal tenderness now deprived of the little girl she had lost. And the deception was real for once in this spirited

nature which revolted at injustice or trouble, but did not give in. Phrosine, leaning towards her son, saw nothing but him. She had only one thought, and her child did not understand it. "When will he throw himself into my arms? my first-born, for whom I suffered, the only one left, no one knows what I have suffered in seeking for him. I have not had his kiss for twelve years. Maurice! Maurice! To-morrow I will be your servant, I will wash your linen; to-morrow, you shall scold me about the thin soup, and the wind which blows under my door. To-morrow, you will exact from me, to whom you will give nothing, the wages earned by your mother, already growing old—but to-day, kiss me!"

But the son sat defiant on his chair, watching the face of Ernoux, whom he knew to be a man hard to deceive. You would have said that he was discussing the conditions of some contract just offered to him, and that there was only one question to examine and solve—was the new place worth the old? Davidée answered. The mother remained silent.

"Will there be any place for my bicycle?"

"The house is large enough," answered Davidée, thinking about the house of the Plains. "The bicycle could be kept under cover without any trouble."

"And is the soil down there heavier than here? The woman says nothing." He pointed to his mother. "She cannot guarantee that I shall get well paid work, at the price Master Ernoux pays me. Shall I get my Sundays free on the farms? Shall I have meat when I thresh? And wine?"

"Those who work there look happy. They do not complain more than elsewhere."

The farmer of La Planche was the first to understand the mother's silence. He was in a hurry to go back to his work. And, seeing through the window an empty cart setting out for the pond, near which the harvest was going on,

"Come," said he, "you can go when autumn sets in. Kiss your mother, you see she is only waiting for that!"

The boy hesitated. Phrosine had got up. He got up. He felt attracted by a strong love, which was unknown to him; he felt himself pressed to the heart which was beating for him; and words which he had never heard hovered round him, "My Maurice, my dear love, kiss me again. Say that you will love me!"

When he escaped from his mother's arms, Maurice Le Floch said simply.

"Yes, having a mother makes a difference. Perhaps I shall get used to it, but I won't give her money!"

Then, taking up his straw hat which he had placed on the floor, he shook himself like a dog who has been petted and said to Ernoux in a low voice.

"I would like to know all the same if the pay is good? If not . . ."

And Phrosine heard.

In the evening, almost in the night, Phrosine and Davidée went back to the village they had left in the morning. Phrosine was no longer the mother full of the hope of getting back her son. She had judged the son, and found him too much like his father. The future would not be made

happier because of him, neither would the daily work be made lighter. All the fatigue, money, time, ingenuity, and dreams she had spent, only served to let her discover the calculating being through whom she would continue to suffer. She would take him away! Oh! surely, no matter what it might cost! For that was her victory over her husband; but this victory promised her no joy and gave her no strength. Then, from out of the bad past, the old vice awakened and she spoke to him, a companion always ready. Davidée heard her laugh and did not understand. Phrosine thought of the betrayals, the feasts, the traps she would set, what she would do to attract Maieul. Her heart was angry, and wild and sad, like a wasp near casks of wine. She went with bold ungainly step, chewing some mint she had gathered in the ditch. The smell of the stalk remained in the air behind her. The hour of separation was drawing near. Phrosine decided to speak. Without looking at Davidée she said:

"I have decided. I shall live near La Planche till November. I don't want Maurice to stop with his father. Let him help me or not, I will not leave him to Le Floch. We will go away from here altogether. Afterwards, I shall see."

She was quiet for a while. Then, changing the tone of her voice, and becoming as aggressive as in the past days, "You have news of the Stonecutter of La Forêt?"

She did not mention Maieul.

"No."

"Well, I have."

"From himself?" Davidée asked quickly.

"No. If it had pleased me to have heard

from him, I could have heard. It seems he has been successful."

"All the better."

"And report says you will marry him."

And Davidée went aside from her who was walking on the same footpath.

"Why do you speak of him to me, and as wickedly as you do?"

"I told you I was bad. Beware of me."

"Phrosine, I do not know what I would like to do one day. But that has nothing to do with anyone."

"Pardon, it has to do with me, I have a right to him."

"He has left you."

"For whose sake? Do you think that such things can be forgiven?"

"For the sake of the little one, whom you let die."

Phrosine stopped. She threw the mint towards Davidée

"I can't live! My husband has gone with another. My son will not share his bread with me. Did he not say so? Did you hear him? And now you want to take my lover from me?"

"Phrosine!"

"I let him go, but I did not give him up."

Davidée's voice answered clearly, "Well, try to take him back—now that he loves me!"

The words galloped like a pack of hounds over the flat ground. The two women heard them pass into the shadow—then they separated. Phrosine returned to the village near the farm of La Planche, and Davidée went on alone, and arrived at the Café of the Woodcutters.

She was not put out. A threat had forced

her to cry out what she herself did not know, what she only thought. Davidée had declared her love, and although it had not been to Maieul himself she was like those betrothed souls who say "I love you, I am yours," and who look with assurance and marvel on the beam thrown by this lighthouse on to the black and agitated sea. The beam does not do away with the unknown, but pierces it through and through.

She had begun to walk quickly when she left Phrosine. Coming near to the houses, she saw at the end of a street one window with a light, and at once the night had no fear or snare for her. This was the only sign of life. The girl went on quite slowly. There was no sound in the warm wind, that rustler of the leaves and disturber of the still standing corn. The light of the stars shone with peaceful joy on to the house roofs and every thing else was wrapped in shadow. "I was obliged to speak. Loving him, I must defend him from her, from himself. Wasn't that my ambition? To raise up abandoned souls and get them to leave their natural sordid misery? He will be my conquest. I only ask his goodwill. What does it matter if he be poor? if he does not resist noble advice he is noble. He is already separated from that creature. It would be admission of weakness to breathe the same air in which his sin was committed. I made a vow which surprised me myself. But what strength must I have for two! What purity! Where shall I get them? I feel myself so ignorant of that which I love, and which tempts me the most. He does not yet know my secret. The secret is mine and hers whom I have put under an

obligation. I have promised, but only in my heart and am still more of a girl than a betrothed. Here is the street. I came to save a woman who was led for a moment by her maternal instincts, but who is no longer upheld by them. She lacks that which I wish to have, the knowledge of self-sacrifice. I have obtained nothing from her. She hates me. However, I do not regret anything. My soul is astonished and light. Let the source whence came the desires of devotion to youth open again! Let me see my way, so that I may help others! Let my love stretch out first of all towards the truth, be it so far off—and even if I only catch one ray from it, like that which eyes receive from the stars, let me not be afraid of seeing, let me be unknown—but capable of doing good!”

She suddenly noticed that she had been praying. The small light in the village had gone out. She was obliged to wake up the landlady at the “Woodcutters.”

Early on the following day, Davidée left the country, where the forest of Vouvant was already warm on the hills.

CHAPTER XIV

THE RETURN TO ARDÉSIE

THE golden month of October brought fresh life to the broom which flowers more than once on the hills of Ardésie. The damp mornings ; the afternoons warm, yellow and light ; the leaves no longer necessary for making shade, but helping the sun to send down rays ; the fear of winter prowling about by night and fleeting by day ; the wish to see again friendly faces ; the established custom of visiting the families of new pupils ; all these reasons and the joy of walking made Davidée take long walks every Thursday and Sunday. She had received on her return from the holidays a letter from the Inspector of elementary schools. He began by announcing that he had been promoted, nominated to a good post in a town near Paris, the result of a promise as well as a reward. Then, after having spoken of himself, he added : " As for you, Mademoiselle, do not doubt the watchful and sympathetic care with which I defended your case. You were, I will not say menaced, but the object of some suspicions which I have allayed. Nothing will remain of this distrust which I had to fight against, I am persuaded, if you will bring prudence, extreme prudence, in showing your feelings, which are

certainly permitted, but which ought to be without any zeal. In all circumstances, believe me, Mademoiselle, etc."

The assistant mistress smiled after reading the letter, and said out loud in her room in which the two o'clock sun was pouring, "Thanks, Daddy Birot! You have won the day!" And the official letter, placed into the little box kept for souvenirs, would have been forgotten if letters had not come to recall it to memory. These were not written by personages, but by young school-mistresses asking advice timidly, or without subterfuge, according to the age, temperament and feelings of the writer. The first letter, before holidays, had almost vexed Davidée, but this trust often repeated revealed sisters of whom she had no idea. She felt her mental solitude decrease, and sympathies were developed in her, and even sweet ones, for those unknown friends whose faces she probably would never see and whose voices she would never hear. She heard of the noble suffering which some of the best of the young girls of France were undergoing with her. How did they come to write these letters to her, and why did these strangers give her their confidences? Who had proclaimed that among the blue stones of Ardésie there was an assistant mistress anxious for the souls of the children, who had one day carried a big prayer-book under her arm, and had not apologised for so doing? Enemies, perhaps, or jealous souls, or some secret admiration, or chattering underlings? Every time that a wire is raised on earth, swallows come to perch on it.

.

"Mademoiselle, I am a young girl of your own age, but I am weak and uncertain. I envy you. I know that you have had the courage to acknowledge yourself a Christian. On several occasions I have lacked your courage. And at the same time I have more faith than the people among whom I live. I am humiliated by the cowardice which prevents me. I would like to be more useful and a better teacher than I am. I suffer in giving only the less good, true and healthy part of me. Give me advice, speak to me, show me books which I should read and which will strengthen me—not only in my imperfect faith but in my duties as a teacher, which should not be paltry and in disagreement with life, as I feel my teaching has been up to now. To see the evil, not daring to say where the good lies, or to speak platitudes which only affect the memory, resting on no foundation—do you know anything about a trouble like this? I have friends—a few—I know or think them to be in a situation similar to mine—will you answer me? I hope so!"

"I live far from you, Mademoiselle. I only know one of your friends, Mademoiselle S., who was a fellow student with you in the Normal School. That is enough to give me confidence in your kindness and discretion. We have had lately a great discussion in the urban school, where I hold the post of assistant mistress. I am very argumentative. I maintain my point with a passion that I try to make polite. But I feel further the want to strengthen it, to assure me in a position which I believe to be right. We were talking morals with the head mistress,

her husband and the other assistant. I maintained that after having by degrees done away with the teaching of the fundamental dogmas of Christianity, the idea of personal immorality, the idea of God, and in consequence of Christian morality, which cannot be separated from it, people had tried to create or dig up morals. Many men of talent and strong passions are employed in doing so. They have made trials. My opponents recognised that these chance morals have had no success. But at that point we divided. I maintained, I affirmed, that they are no longer seeking, they have given up the idea of having morals. I said that was a great betrayal of the families, of the children, and that our ambition, which is to prepare for life, could not sustain us as before; that it had been warped in ourselves, that ambition which had been our first motive. They did not agree. Tell me what you think."

"Mademoiselle, I have read irreligious books which have worried me. One particularly well written, but cruel and without any hope, I left off in the middle because I told myself I have not sufficient knowledge to criticise my reading or to bear it. I am worried about it. For a moment I was carried away by the idea of a religion without dogma, which would only be an intimate impulse of our soul towards God. On reflecting I understood that that would be anarchy, quite the reverse of religious society and common morals. But my weakness brings me back to the arguments I have already refuted. Do you know this persecution of ourselves by ourselves, which is so hard and

wearisome, when one has no one in whom to confide? Among my companions at the Normal School there are surely some who are suffering as I suffer and who like me, do not dare to acknowledge it. There are some who want affection, and I would hold out a hand to these. For us, the days here are often interesting, full of a factitious exterior life, but when I come back to my evening solitude I tell myself that my mind has thrown no light and has received none. Help me! The courage of one person is enough for many. I come to you to seek the strength to remain myself, to be good, to trust completely."

Mademoiselle Birot also received several visits. She had even seen a young man come to the school the night before it opened—a teacher in the commune of the neighbouring Department.

"Well, my dear," Mademoiselle Renée Desforges had said, "you are becoming famous. Letters, visits, I don't envy you, and I doubt if that will help you. Anyhow—he is in the yard, he is asking for you; do you wish me to send him away?"

"No, I am going down."

"You have not unpacked."

"I will come up again."

This young master, pink and curled and elaborate in his clothes and speech, spoke at first as a comrade, nicely and as if he had not had any other reason for coming to amuse himself in the schoolyard, than a youthful attraction for a pretty girl with ready wit. But before going he held out his hand, became quite serious, and he

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had something quite different from love in his eyes when he said,

“There are not too many of us who think the same. We must know each other. And then it is so good to see courage.”

The assistant mistress wrote in her note-book —“What is the matter with them all? What have I done that is so wonderful? Why come to me? Alas! if they knew the truth, they would see that I am not yet the Christian they think me to be. They force me to pay attention to these religious problems; if they do not leave me any peace they are my advancement, rather than I their advice. My restless sisters, my tender sisters, I would like to visit you in your schoolrooms, in the poor clean rooms where you find the sweet remedy of solitude. You sometimes weep, you put up with the mischief, the insults, the injustice of the friends you love, and the separation of ignorance pleased with itself. I am only one among you, and not she who has suffered the most—I have an idea, I guess, I force myself, I aspire, and I receive the daily lesson—I have been where God is not—it is awful. You have been sent to me, that I may know one of the most beautiful affections in the world, which feels for the strange child, which questions itself and accuses itself, saying, ‘Have I given her strength? Will the mothers be mothers, will the wives be wives? With what purity can I arm myself? Will mine be enough, so trembling and consisting of instinct and example?’ All the indefinite news of the future is before me. For my little ones and for me I feel that I ought to have an interior life, by which we could all live.—Sisters, up to this

moment I have only prayed to Him who can give this life or increase it, timidly, by surprise or emotion. And you do not know that! What a dryness in the world that a drop of water, like me, preserved by I cannot tell what chance should be such an attraction and seem to be a spring!"

Davidée paid her visits to the parents of the new pupils. They received her well. She found again, in the mothers' confidences and the children's affections, all the cares she had had for the pupils of the past year. Several women whom she had no intention of going to see called her from the threshold of their doors.

"Well, Mademoiselle, are you then too proud to come in?"

She was not proud, but she was in trouble because Maieul had neither written to her nor returned. She was a little astonished when one afternoon towards the end of October—it had rained during the night, and the crows were flying over the stripped hedges—little Jeannie Fete-Dieu, who was watching her from a house near the church, said to her, "Grandmother sends you her love, Mademoiselle; it seems that she has some news. If you had time just to come to our house?"

"What news?"

The answer was ready. It must be a commission from Maieul that the good woman was carrying out. Davidée went up the little rise, past the church, then along the path which leads through the broom on the height of La Gravelle, and sinks down into the wood where the little house and garden were hidden. The sick woman was in her bed, which was just touched by the

sun's rays for half an hour during the day. She was sitting up and beating the late flies which were worrying her with a stalk of box. She did not move more than usual, but she said she was better, and her eyes were quick like those of a younger woman.

"The year is beginning well!" she said.

"Why, mother?"

"Because people are coming towards you as if you were the month of May! 'Good morning, Mademoiselle Davidée! Come to see us!' That is all one hears in the villages."

"What do you know about it?"

"Jeannie is my ear and legs, and her heart remembers the sweet words they say about you. And what would you say, Mademoiselle, if I told you that there is still someone who wants to see you?"

The girl became sad, and said, "I should hardly believe you."

"But if he gave me a commission?"

"Tell me, mother."

"Has he not written to you?"

"No, not since he went away."

"He is afraid, because you are so clever."

"Is that why he has not come all this month since I have been back in Ardésie? The forest is not far, and he could be here in two hours by the train."

The sick woman stretched out her hand and touched the girl's bare arm with the sprig of box like a mother correcting her child.

"You mistrust life, little one"

"Because I know it."

"Not everything. You have seen the worst side, or something like it. There is a remedy

for all of us who have good-will. There is also help."

"Where?"

"In Paradise."

"I do not know the way there."

"It is easily found. Listen again. I have seen Maieul."

"He has been and did not try to see me?"

"You were away in the holidays. He spoke to me as if he were my son. Ah, what a fine man he looked, his face was firm, and he was dressed like a gentleman."

"And his heart, mother? What does his dress matter to me?"

"Wait a little. Maieul had worked so well there that he had been promoted, he had been made overseer last week, and people say he may become principal overseer—it is a good position."

"Certainly, but his heart? Has he got over his trouble?"

Jeannie, at a look from the sick woman, left the room, and her shadow went swinging down the garden along the flower beds to the end. The gladness had left the old face, but not the calm, nor that certainty that old honest people have, who have already entered into their soul's victory.

"You are not to be pitied; he is just a little weak and is afraid of himself."

"No—of her!"

"Of her—if you like."

She turned her head on her raised pillows, poor Mother Fete-Dieu, thinking, "You can hide nothing from this young schoolmistress."

"I am sure she writes to him."

"Well, yes!"

"Since August?"

"Before that. She tried to get him back. But he does not answer. He counts the days. And if he does not wish to return, it is because he has too much respect and friendship for you."

"He says so."

"Be sure of it. He left Ardésie because he could not live near her who was the cause of his sin. Speaking to me he said, 'I shall only return when I shall be able to say I shall live in Ardésie and shall not meet remorse there.'"

"He said 'remorse'?"

"Yes, dear. And he is not the man to lie. If he returns, he will not go away again. You can trust him."

"As much as one can trust a man"

"You say well—a man. But his intention is good. Listen again. I asked him just to see, 'Could Mademoiselle Davidée become a good Christian, Maieul?'"

"As a matter of fact I am going in that direction. What did he say?"

"He said, 'That does not frighten me. If I were married, I should be like her.'"

The assistant arose and caressed the limp hand, so tired with having held the twig, and the face which had become grave, moved by feeling for youth.

"Mother Fete-Dieu, I do not commission you with any answer. I shall neither write nor ask someone else to do so. I shall wait. I do not say that I shall consent if he asks me. It is possible that I am destined to climb alone. I shall take no step towards him; I have not

sought him. I shall not seek him, if he goes away from me."

At the end of the garden, Jeannie who saw her pass, was greatly astonished that the mistress's eyes were red, for grandmother had spoken of Maieul. She was hitting on a nail with the heel of a sabot, to show that she had not been listening. When she saw the assistant, she stopped the demonstration and said, "Good morning, Mademoiselle."

The calls of the housekeepers in the village had no answer, Davidée just made some sign of friendship—she hastened home to cry.

She cried a long time. What impotence! to whom to turn? There were then people insensible to all proof of friendship, like Phrosine and her husband, incapable of honour, loyalty, justice, and others, who were so feeble that pure love alone could not save them, and who, although thus succoured by the power of a virgin, incline towards evil, and return again to it! Useless thoughts of the summer, lost anxieties, vain tenderness which thought itself so strong! How rough to live among hearts like these! To try to make them live? What derision! And to-morrow, in a year, as long as the time to retire had not come, she must continue this superhuman effort, and be contented with the illusion, the semblance of which she must offer to the fathers and mothers burdened with children asking "Educate them" Two griefs make only one—to be abandoned; to pour out her soul without profit! Not to be happy and not to give happiness!

Davidée had opened the drawer of her table, and re-read some of the letters which

the unknown sisters had sent her. She read everywhere the same words—"You, a Christian!" She recalled the words of Mother Fete-Dieu, "There is help in Paradise." "The way has been shown to me," she thought. And she took the prayer-book and opened it, and found a little picture between the leaves—it was a picture of the Crucified One. For a moment she looked for a place to pose her kiss. Then put her lips to the wounded heart of the Redeemer and said—"Help me!"

In the cold wind that was blowing that evening she went out, and by roundabout roads she came to the house of the Plains. It was deserted. The plum trees had no leaves now, the pear trees in pyramids rose here and there in the early night, as red and yellow as flames.

CHAPTER XV

THE PERMISSION

THE November mists, cold, heavy and clinging, dragged down the decaying leaves to the ground where they rotted. The pear trees no longer looked like burning torches. The wind had been walled in by clouds, and the house smoke was twisting and curling about, when one morning the door of the house of the Plains opened, and the window which looked on to the little yard as well. There was no smoke coming from the chimney, and far and near this house alone was silent. Phrosine went round the room, where the white mildew covered the window-panes with its soapy froth. The dead cat, was lying in the cinders on the hearth like a mummy. The odour of death had penetrated the walls and beams. Phrosine did not go into the next room, she hastened to go out, and outside, two paces from the threshold, she listened with hanging arms.

Maurice Le Floch must have been an hour going to the different farms, trying to find a place for the winter. The cardboard portmanteau covered with sheepskin was lying in the middle of the little path, among the high grass, which nobody had mown. He might return, at any moment with the longed-for news. But Phrosine

was expecting another visit. And she had done her hair and dressed herself carefully for this in the little inn in the outskirts where she had slept. He could not be long, she had written to Maieul Jacquet two days ago. "I shall expect you, my dear one. I shall be at the house gate. I wish to say good-bye, for you cannot have forgotten me." She did not question, she had calculated that on leaving the train he would take the Pyramid Tramway and by the roads through the orchards would appear about half-past twelve, and she would know how to keep him and begin life again with him, either here or there at Ardésie or La Forêt; what did it matter?

She listened. It was the dinner hour in the farms, factories, timber-yards, when work is interrupted. And one could have heard the footstep of a man going down the *Chateau Rogen Hill* towards the fields of blue stone, if the wind had not picked up the noises of the town in passing, and the groans of the branches and gable ends and hedges pruned down to the soil and sharpened like whistles. Life, passed in this house, was the picture in Phrosine's eyes, and in her beating heart, the time she had spent with Maieul, except those days when a great trouble made her weep, and she did not wish to remember sorrow.

And when it was almost half-past twelve, a handsome young man turned into the road which Phrosine had been watching so long from a road which she could not see, and which led from the town. She had gone to the beginning of the little, thin orchard full of grass, she had crossed her arms on the lattice-work gate. Her

face was fresh and young with hidden passion ; she felt herself strong because Maieul was coming to her ; and a slight and dangerous smile played on her lips.

The assistant teacher yonder was watching the children in the play hour, and she had no thought that Maieul was so near to Phrosine

Maieul, perceiving the woman who was watching for him, turned pale, and his step was slower. He had obeyed Phrosine's call through weakness, and trusting in himself. "Yes, certainly, I shall say good-bye to her—I must." Poor man, who believed that the past was dead! Since the morning he had been travelling towards this dreadful moment, towards this woman. His anxiety had increased. Now Phrosine was before him, and seeing her in this place, in the enclosure to which every evening he had returned as a married man to his wife, he was in terror, feeling the battle of his blood about his heart. His throat was bursting. Phrosine's smile called him with a dangerous charm, not to be avoided. She did not speak so long as he was some way off, but when he was near enough to read the eyes, large and shining in her madness, she said .

"I knew you would come! Come! We were happy before. Come!"

She looked at him so sweetly that his heart was touched, and she opened the gate slowly, so that he only saw her eyes, and heard nothing but the word which kept him captive. But when the lattice was open and the path free, Maieul cast his eyes to the ground. He saw the tall grass, and the wretched plum trees under which Anna Le Floch had lived those last days ;

again he saw in his mind the child who was endeavouring to send away sin from the house, and who died of it. And then, he who had been so weak, and as if lost, was sustained by a new strength. The prayers of Davidée came to his succour, and the merit of little Anna helped him in his need. He began to turn away from the woman and from the house, and said :

"I came to say good-bye, Phrosine, and there, it is done."

"Already! We cannot part so quickly, you who come from so far, and I too! Come, my Maieul!"

She hoped that he would look at her again. But he turned completely away.

"Phrosine," he said, "I can no longer be what I have been."

"Who forbids it?"

"One who has the right."

"I know her."

"Yes. You did know her—it is your dead child."

He had already passed the hedge. He was going towards Ardésie. Phrosine ran after him, and cried out in anger :

"It is not the little one, but the other, the wretch! She has taken my lover from me!"

But she did not try to overtake him. And as another man, much younger, came down the little path which seems to prowl round the farms coming out near the gate, she called out :

"Maurice, have you found anything?"

"No!"

"Neither have I! Come, pick up the bag and let us get on again!"

In the school-yard Davidée Birot was superintending the recreation. School-time was near at hand. The children had nearly all arrived. One of them came quite frightened to the assistant and said, "There is someone at the door asking for you."

Poor Davidée Birot did not know who was asking for her. But as a certain thought never left her, she turned as white as the painted houses of Blandes, when she opened the big chestnut-wood gate.

Maieul Jacquet was seen standing behind a pillar in his Sunday clothes, and so full of emotion that his lips could speak no words, and he seemed like a pilgrim arrived at the city of his dream.

"It is I, Mademoiselle Davidée!"

This woman did not smile, she was no temptress. She seemed like some one dead, because she herself was going to judge her fate.

"Oh!" she said, "I had given up expecting you."

"I could not come, but I have worked for you."

"Thanks."

"I am overseer at La Forêt, and they will give me work at Ardésie when I wish."

He understood that she was waiting for something else. He said, after a moment's pause:

"Mademoiselle, I can live in Ardésie now."

She did not answer, but she began to soften, as those do who are rising from the very depths of sorrow.

"Yes, now, I can take the house at La Gravelle again—but I want your permission."

Seeing that the girl could not answer because

of the grief she felt for the past, the man went on :

“ It would be more than my happiness if you consent—it would mean my salvation.” He added, “ For this world and for the next also.”

Davidée raised her eyes towards the mists which dispersed beneath the warmth of the sun. Then she answered : “ Take the house at La Gravelle, Maieul Jacquet.”

And the bell rang for the opening of school.

THE END

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For other titles see pp 44 and 45.

NEW SHILLING (Net) NOVELS

* New revised edition—almost rewritten—and reset from new type

* DR PHILLIPS. A Ma:da-Vale Idyll	FRANK DANBY
TROPICAL TALES (7th edition)	DOLF WILLARDE
THE PERFIDIOUS WELSHMAN (10th ed)	"DRAIG GLAS"
THE GARDEN OF LIFE (2nd edition)	KATE HORN
No. 5 JOHN STREET (20th edition)	RICHARD WHITEING

For other titles see pp 45 and 46

NEW SIX SHILLING NOVELS

Captain Hawks, Master Mariner. OSWALD KENDALL

Admirers of the novels of W. W. Jacobs should read this. It is a story of three men who cannot and will not abide dullness. Though separated superficially by discipline and convention, Captain Hawks, Grummet, and "Cert'nly" Wilfred are brothers 'under their skins,' and are controlled by the same insatiable desire for variety. Their thirst for the unexpected is amply satisfied in the search for an illusive cargo of sealskins, purchased without having been seen by Captain Hawks, and though much of the story takes place at sea, all technicalities have been carefully omitted. That the crew are nearly drowned, nearly frozen, nearly starved, and nearly smothered proves that they succeeded in a search for a life where things happen. Their success is also financial, and the story leaves them with a hint of further adventures to follow. A capital yarn.

The Irresistible Mrs. Ferrers. ARABELLA KENEALY

Author of "Nerissa," "The Making of Anthea," "Dr. Janet of Harley Street," "The Woman-Hunter," etc.

The irresistible Mrs. Ferrers is a fashionable beauty, the loveliest, wittiest, best-dressed and most fascinating woman of her century. She is the idol of London society. Hostesses fight and plot to get her to their parties. The men of her world vie with one another for the privilege of driving her to Hurlingham. And yet no breath of scandal touches her. For her ambition is to be known to history as the most beautiful and brilliant woman of her day who charmed all men and succumbed to none. But Lord Lygon comes, a clever and attractive man, estranged from his wife. He lays siege to her, and the story turns upon the rivalry and struggle of the two women, of the wife who devotedly loves him, and of the other who, though fond of him, is loth to sacrifice her dazzling impeccability and to forego her unique position for his sake. A young doctor complicates matters, and there is a scene between Mrs. Ferrers and a homicidal maniac in which she needs all her wits for self defence. There are some charming children in the book and some original views on the woman question.

The Three Anarchists. MAUD STEPNEY RAWSON

Author of "A Lady of the Regency," "The Stairway of Honour," "The Enchanted Garden," "The Easy Go-Luckies," etc.

There are fine and beautiful things in this novel. There is true delicate psychology and clean bold handling of subjects which in feebler hands might easily have been unpleasant if not offensive. There is true pathos and a fine perception of the importance of the tiny incidents and minor happenings of daily life as affecting the human drama. Janet is the unsatisfied, soul-starved young wife of an elderly, weak, cruel and penurious man, and the other principal character is a human stepson at inevitable enmity with so opposite a father, both craving for the fullness of life, the woman a real woman all through with a fine perception of what is right intensely desirous of founding a real home and making real happiness, and the young man of warm flesh and blood responding to her pure woman's love and care with more than mere affection. And yet there is not a false note in all the narrative which after a tragic happening ends finely.

A Grey Life: A Romance of Modern Bath. "RITA"

Author of "Peg the Rake," "My Lord Concert," "Countess Daphne," "Grim Justice," etc.

"Rita" has chosen Bath as a setting for her new novel. She has disdained the 'powder and patches' period, and given her characters the more modern interests of Bath's transition stage in the seventies and eighties. Her book deals with the struggles of an impoverished Irish family of three sisters—who establish themselves in Bath—to whom comes an orphaned niece with the romantic name of Rosaleen Le Suir. She is only a child of fourteen when she arrives, but it is her pen that weaves the story and its fascinating mystery of the Grey Lady in the attic. The history and sad tragedies of this recluse give the story its title, though fuller interest is woven into the brilliant and erratic personality of a certain Chevalier Theophrastus O'Shaughnessy, at once the most charming and original sketch of the Irish adventurer ever penned by a modern writer. In fact, one might safely say that the Chevalier is the male prototype of "Rita's" wonderful and immortal 'Peg the Rake'.

The Three Destinies.

J. A. T. LLOYD

Author of "The Lady of Kensington Gardens," "A Great Russian Realist," etc

The scene of this novel opens in the Elgin Room of the British Museum, where its *dramatis personæ* are grouped by chance in front of the familiar statue of the "Three Fates." Among them are three young girls and a boy of eighteen, all quite at the beginning of things and vaguely interested in the mysterious future before them. The fact that they have grouped themselves in front of this particular statue attracts the attention of an old professor, who determines to bring them together again, and experiment with their young lives with the same curiosity that a chemist experiments with chemicals. The scene shifts from the Elgin Room to Ireland, and then to Paris and Brittany, Vienna and Dalmatia but the hero is always under the spell of that first chance meeting in front of the statue. One person after the other plays with his life and again and again he and the others report themselves on New Year's Day to the old professor, who reads half mockingly the jumble of lives that he himself has produced. In the end the hero realises that these young girls have become to him in turn modern interpreters of the three ancient Destinies.

The King's Master

OLIVE LETHBRIDGE and JOHN DE STOURTON

A novel dealing with the troublous times of Henry VIII, in which the political situation, Court intrigues and religious discussions of the period are treated in a masterly manner. A strong love element is introduced, and the characters of Anne Boleyn and Thomas Cromwell are presented in an entirely new light, while plot and counter plot, hair breadth escapes, love, hate, revenge, and triumph all go to form the theme.

Maggie of Margate. A Romance of the Idle Rich.

GABRIELLE WODNIL

"Maggie of Margate," a beautiful girl with an unobtrusive style which attracted fine men out of ten, was in reality an exclusive lady of title, bored because she sighed for realism and romance, and was affianced to a prospective peer. How she contrived a dual individuality is the pith of the story, which is in no way high flown. Maggie is a delightful creation, and her very erring frailty and duplicity makes us pity her the more. She cannot break away finally from her social status, but to retain it she nearly breaks her heart. The man of her fancy, *Michael Blair*, is the most striking figure in the whole story, which teems with varied characters, all of which hold us intently from the first page to the last. All the world loves a lover, and, therefore, every one will love Michael Blair.

The Celebrity's Daughter.

VIOLET HUNT

Author of "The Doll," "White Rose of Weary Leaf," etc

Life like portraits, a tangled plot only fully unravelled in the last chapter, go to the making of Miss Violet Hunt's stories. "The Celebrity's Daughter" has the humour, smart dialogue, the tingling life of this clever writer's earlier novels. It is the autobiography of the daughter of a celebrity who has fallen on evil days. Told in the author's inimitable style.

Paul Burdom

SIR WILLIAM MAGNAY

Author of "The Fruits of Indiscretion," "The Long Hand," etc

This is a strong story full of exciting incidents. The hero is a farmer crippled for want of capital which he finds quite unexpectedly. A thunderstorm and an irate husband cause a young banker to seek refuge at the farm, from which a loud knocking causes further retreat to a big family tomb, which becomes his own when the lightning brings some old runs down and buries both. The banker's bag of gold falls into the hands of the farmer, who profits by its use. Other characters play important parts, and love interest adds its softening charm.

Cheerful Craft.

R ANDOM

Author of "We Three and Troddles," "Neighbours of Mine"
With 60 original illustrations

There is nothing sombre or introspective about "Cheerful Craft," and those who agree with Mr. Balfour's view of the need of lighter and brighter books will find here something to please them. Broad humour and rollicking adventure characterise this story. A city clerk rises from obscurity and attains to a position of wealth and dignity, and carries us with him all the way, condoning his rascality for the sake of his ready humour and cheery optimism. After all he is a merry rogue, and he works no great harm to anyone, and much good to himself, and incidentally to most of those with whom he comes in contact. We hardly know in which form to like him most, as Hilary Ford, ex-clerk, loungeur and tramp, or Havelock Rose, the son of a wealthy ship-owner, whose place he usurps under circumstances which do credit to the writer's ingenuity without putting too great a strain on the credulity of the reader.

Love's Cross Roads.

L. T. MEADE

Author of "Desborough's Wife," "Ruffles," etc

This is the story of a good and honourable man who in a moment of sudden temptation fell. How his sin found him out—what he suffered from remorse, how, with all his strivings, he was nearly circumvented, and how, just when he thought all would be well, he nearly lost what was far above gold to him is ably described. The story is highly exciting, and from the first page to the last it would be difficult to put the book down. The account of the villain who sought to ruin Paul Colthurst, and to cause the death of either young Peter or Pamala, is full of terrible interest. But perhaps the most truly life-like character in the whole book is Silas Luke, the poor miserable tramp, who though bribed, tempted, tortured yet could not bring himself to do the evil thing suggested, and who was saved by the sweet girl who was meant to be his victim. The repentance of the tramp leads to the greater repentance of Paul Colthurst. The story ends happily.

The Swelling of Jordan.

CORALIE STANTON AND

HEATH HOSKIN Authors of "Plumage," "The Muzzled Ox," etc

Canon Oriol, an earnest worker in the East End, loved and respected, had years before the story commenced, while climbing with his friend Digby Cavan in Switzerland, found in the pocket of his friend's coat, which he had accidentally put on instead of his own, evidence that his friend had robbed him, the canon's, brother and been the cause of his committing suicide. Oriol, in a struggle which took place between the two men, hurled his friend from the precipice. Now the glacier gives up Cavan's rucksack, and any day it may yield up his body. To reveal subsequent developments would spoil the reader's enjoyment of a thrilling plot.

Opal of October.

JOY SHIRLEY

For those born in the month of October, the opal is said to be a lucky stone, and this novel is based upon the assumption that it is so. It is a story of the times of the soothsayers and the witches, when people were all more or less trying to discover the philosopher's stone which turns everything to gold. The witch in this case is a young girl of great beauty, who narrowly escapes the stake.

Galbraith of Wynyates.

E EVERETT-GREEN

Author of "Duckworth's Diamonds," "Clive Lorimer's Marriage," etc, etc

This is a story of the ill consequence following upon the making of an unwise will. Joyce is the only daughter of the real owner of Wynyates who has let the property to a relative who is the next of kin after his daughter. Warned of the uncertainty of his own life he wills the property to his daughter in trust during her minority, and appoints the relative who holds the property as tenant, trustee. Overhearing a conversation between the family lawyer and her uncle, who discuss the unwisdom of placing her in the charge of one who is directly interested in her death, she imagines all kinds of evil intentions on the part of her guardian, and looks with suspicion upon all his counsels for her welfare. Love interests lead to complications, but the unfaithfulness of her lover leaves her free and she finally marries the guardian of whom she had stood so long in fear. It is a very readable book written in the author's best style.

The Ban

LESTER LURGAN

Author of "The Mill-owner," "Bohemian Blood," etc., etc

This is a story of mystery involving the Ban of Blood. Brenda is a pretty, charming, and very feminine girl of good English family who marries one who adores her, but who has, unknown to himself, Red Indian blood in his veins. This is revealed to him by an old nurse on her death bed, and is demonstrated on his return to his wife by the birth of a son who bears unmistakable signs of the terrible inheritance. An old mystery is explained, and new tragedies follow. The child is placed under the care of the grandmother's tribe but soon succumbs, nor does the father long survive the awful experience. After his death Brenda marries her childhood's playmate and first love.

Bright Shame

KEIGHLEY SNOWDEN

Author of "The Free Marriage," "The Plunder Pit," "Hate of Evil," etc

Stephen Gaunt, an English sculptor famous in Italy, is the father of a son born out of wedlock, whom he has never heard of. In his youth, a light attachment broken in a causeless fit of jealousy drove him abroad, but when the story opens he is a strong and engaging personality. He comes home to execute a commission, and meets his son without knowing him. In doing so, he encounters a couple, childless themselves, who have passed the boy off as their own since infancy, when his mother died. They are an elder half-brother, who has always hated Stephen, and his sensitive, tender and simple wife, who loves the boy with all her heart, fears to lose him, and who is yet tormented by her secret. A romantic friendship springs up between son and father, and the chain of accidents and proofs by which he learns the truth, his struggle for control of the boy, who has genius, and the effect of these events on the boy and his foster mother make a fascinating plot.

A Star of the East A Story of Delhi

CHARLES

L. PEARCE Author of "The Amazing Duchess," "The Beloved Princess," "Love Besieged," "Red Revenge," etc

"East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet" This is the theme of Mr Pearce's new novel of life in India. The scene is laid in Delhi, the city of all others where for the past hundred years the traditions of ancient dynasties and the barbaric splendours of the past have been slowly retreating before the ever-advancing influence of the West. The conflict of passions between Nara, the dancing girl, in whose veins runs the blood of Shah Jehan, the most famous of the Kings of Delhi, and Clare Stanhope, born and bred in English conventionality, never so pronounced as in the Fifties, is typical of the differences between the East and the West. The rivalry of love threads its way through a series of exciting incidents, culminating in the massacre and the memorable siege of Delhi. This book completes the trilogy of Mr Pearce's novels of the Indian Mutiny, of which "Love Besieged" and "Red Revenge" were the first and second.

The Destiny of Claude.

MAY WYNNE

Author of "Henri of Navarre," "The Red Fleur de Lys," "Honour's Fetters," etc

Claude de Marbeille to escape a convent life joins her friend Margot de Ladrennes in Touraine. Jacques Comte de Ladrennes, a hunchback, falls in love with her, and when the two girls go to Paris to enter the suite of the fifteen year old Mary Queen of Scots, he follows and takes service with the Duke of Guise. Claude, however, falls in love with Archie Cameron, an officer of the Scottish Guard, who by accident discovers how Queen Mary has been tricked by her Uncles of Guise into signing papers bequeathing Scotland to France in the event of her dying childless. Cameron is imprisoned, but escapes in time to warn the Scots Commissioners on their way home of this act of treachery. Cameron is followed by a spy of the Guises, and the four Commissioners die by poison. Cameron recovers, and returns to Paris to find that Claude has been sent to some unknown Convent. The rest of the tale relates Cameron's search for his sweetheart, the self-sacrifice of the Comte de Ladrennes, and the repentance and atonement of Margot de Ladrennes, who through jealousy betrays her friend.

Susan and the Duke.

KATE HORN

Author of "Edward and I and Mrs Honeybun," "The White Owl," "The Lovelocks of Diana," etc

Lord Christopher Fitzarden, younger brother of the Duke of Cheadle, is the most delightful of young men. He adopts the old family servants destined for the almshouses by the cynical Duke, who bestows upon him the family house in Mayfair. Nanny, his old nurse keeps him in order. Susan Ringsford, the heroine, is an early visitor. She is in love with Kit but he falls madly in love with Rosalind Pilkington, the heiress of a rich manufacturer. The contrast between the two girls is strongly drawn. Susan, sweet and refined—a strong character but of insignificant appearance, and Rosalind radiantly beautiful—ambitious and coarse of nature. The whole party go caravanning with Lady Barchester and an affected little poet, and many love scenes are woven into the tour in the New Forest. Susan and the Duke of Cheadle have a conversation—the Duke loves her in silence, and sees that she loves his brother. He gets up a flirtation with Rosalind, who, anxious to be a duchess, throws over Kit immediately. The Duke disillusions her. Meanwhile Susan and Kit have come together, and the book ends with wedding bells.

Lonesome Land

B. M. BOWER

A strong, human story in which Valeria Peyson, an Eastern girl, goes out to a desolate Montana town to marry the lover who has preceded her three years before. Unfortunately the lover has not had the moral fibre to stand the unconventional life of Western life, and has greatly deteriorated. However, they marry and live on his ranch where Valeria finds that the country and her husband are by no means what she thought them. She does her best to make the life endurable and is aided by the kindness of her husband's closest friend, a rough diamond with an honest heart. Out of this situation is unfolded a strong tale of character development and over-mastering love that finds a dramatic outcome in happiness for those most deserving it.

Confessions of Perpetua.

ALICE M DIEHL

Author of "A Mysterious Lover," "The Marriage of Lenore," etc

Perpetua is the youngest of three daughters of a baronet, all of whom make wealthy marriages, a duke a viscount and a colonel sharing the baronet's family. The story opens when Perpetua emerges from the care of her governess and enters society under the auspices of the duchess. She marries against the warnings of the countess and divorces the colonel within three months of their union, and yet all proceeds in a perfectly natural and straightforward manner. The process of disillusion from love and enchantment is well described, and other Perpetuas may well learn a lesson from the heroine's experience. The characters are well drawn and distinct, and the narrative develops dramatic incidents from time to time.

A Modern Ahab

THEODORA WILSON WILSON

Author of "Bess of Hardendale," "Moll o' the Toll-Bar," etc

This is a very readable novel in the author's best manner. Rachael Despensar, a successful artist, spends a summer holiday in a Westmoreland village, living at an old farm house, and making friends of the people. Grimstone, a local baronet, is grabbing the land to make a deer run, and Rachael comes into collision with him, but is adored by his delicate little son. Right-of way troubles ensue, and violence disturbs the peace. Grimstone's elder son and heir returns from Canada, where he has imbibed Radical notions. He sympathises with the villagers, and is attracted towards Rachael whom he marries. The baronet determines to oust the farmer whom Rachael had championed, when the tragic death of his delicate little son leads him to relinquish the management of the estate to his heir.

The Annals of Augustine

RAFAEL SABATINI

Author of "Bardelys the Magnificent," "The Lion's Skin," etc

Mr Sabatini lays before his readers in "The Annals of Augustine" a startling and poignant human document of the Italian Renaissance. It is the autobiographical memoir of Augustine, Lord of Mondolfo, one of the lesser tyrants of Emilia, a man pre-natally vowed to the cloister by his over-devout mother. With merciless self-analysis does Augustine in these memoirs reveal his distaste for the life to which he was foredoomed and his early efforts to break away from the repellent path along which he is being forced. The Lord of Mondolfo's times are the times of the Farnese Pope (Paul III.), whose terrible son, Pier Luigi Farnese, the Duke of Parma, lives again, sinister and ruthless, in these pages. As a mirror of the Cinquecento, "The Annals of Augustine" deserves to take an important place, whilst for swiftness of action and intensity of romantic interest it stands alone.

Stanley Paul's New Six Shilling Novels—continued.

Dagobert's Children

L. J. BEESTON

"Mr Beeston's spirited work is already well known to a large circle of readers, but this book is the most powerful he has yet written, and for plot, dramatic incident, and intensity of emotion reaches a very high level. The successive chapters are alive with all the breath and passion of war, and are written with a vividness and power which holds the reader's interest to the last word."

The Redeemer.

RENÉ BAZIN

Author of "The Children of Alsace," "The Nun," "Redemption," etc

This is a romance of village life in the Loire country, with love complications which awaken sympathy and absorb interest. Davidée is a junior mistress in the village school, and the story mainly concerns her love attraction and moral restraint. She is drawn towards Maievel Jacquet, a worker in the slate quarries near by, with whom Phrosine, a beautiful young woman who has left her husband, is living. Davidée befriends them, but on the death of their child Maievel goes away and Phrosine, who dislikes Davidée because of her superior morality, goes in search of her son by her husband. Both return to the village, and Phrosine seeks reunion with Maievel, who refuses her telling her that their dead son bars the way. Phrosine attributes this to the interposition of Davidée, and ultimately leaves with another lover. There is now no longer any barrier between Maievel and Davidée, who can hence follow her attraction without violating her scruples.

The She-Wolf

MAXIME FORMONT

Author of "A Child of Chance," etc. Translated from the French by Elsie F. Buckley

This is a powerful novel of the life and times of Cæsar Borgia, in which history and romance are mingled with a strong hand. The author holds Cæsar guilty of the murder of his brother, and shows a strong motive for the crime. The story of the abduction of Alva Colonna on the eve of her marriage with Prospero Sarelli, when she is carried off to his palace at Rome and becomes his slave-mistress, is related. The subsequent events, more or less following history or tradition, include the introduction of the dark woman of gipsy extraction, who enamours Cæsar, and poisons the wine by which the Colonna and her old lover Sarelli die. Cæsar is shown strong, brutal, unscrupulous and triumphant. The story closes with a description of his last days and death. This novel has been highly popular in France.

Her Majesty the Flapper.

A. E. JAMES

With a picture wrapper of "Her Majesty" in colours

There is a fresh, natural touch about these episodes in the development of a Flapper which make them breezy and refreshing reading, involving no little amusement. Her Majesty the Flapper is a lady-flapper, of course, neither a bounder nor a cad, but just a flapper. Accessories, willing or unwilling, are her cousins Victoria and Bobbie, a male person over thirty, who tells most of the story, though the Flapper is as irrepressible in the telling of the story as in acting it. Of course, Bobbie is victimised, and the story ends with the coming out of the Flapper, and the final victimisation takes the form of an engagement. Readers will sympathise with Bobbie, and some will envy him.

Chaff and the Wind.

G. VILLIERS STUART

Chaff and the Wind is a novel showing the working of the unseen hand, and telling the story of a man who shirked his destiny, and who was forced to watch the career of another who rose to heights of national fame, while he himself drifted like chaff before the wind. It is a novel of incident illustrating a theory, and is therefore more dramatic than psychological. The action of life and destiny on character is more indicated than the action of character on life.

The Marble Aphrodite.

ANTHONY KIRBY GILL

An imaginative story of a young sculptor who, inspired by Venus, produces an Aphrodite of amazing loveliness and nobility. Carroll, the chief character, is an idealist, a devotee of art, and a worshipper of beauty, and the main theme of the novel is centred in and about his creation of this statue. Other characters include a painter who encourages his young friend's idealism, a wealthy aristocrat of a cynical bent of mind, a beautiful and accomplished actress, a poet, and a society lady married to a man of evil reputation. The conflicting interests of these people, the effects of their actions, tragic and otherwise, the scenes in the studios and the society, theatrical, and Bohemian scenes, including the glimpse given of the night side of London life, form a realistic background or setting for the principal motive, which, though closely interwoven with it, is of a purely imaginative and idealistic character. Psychological analysis enters largely into the author's treatment, and the story reflects here and there certain mental movements of the day.

The Poodle-Woman.

ANNESLEY KENEALY

Author of "Thus Saith Mrs Grundy"

Miss Annesley Kenealy's new novel deals with the feminine side of the great unrest of our time, and she sets herself to answer the questions "What do Women Want?" and "What is the cause of their great unrest?" It is a charming love story, dealing mainly with two women, a man, and a mannikin. It presents feminism from an entirely fresh standpoint, but polemics are entirely absent. In a series of living moving pictures it shows how the games of life and matrimony are played under rules which put all the best cards of the pack into men's hands. The heroine is an emotional Irish girl, with the reckless romance of the Celt and the chivalry of a woman, who keeps sweet through very bitter experiences. Possessing no world craft she is slave to her heart, and gives and forgives unto seventy times seven. The book is epigrammatic and full of humour.

The Romance of Bayard LT-COL. ANDREW C P

HAGGARD, D.S.O. Author of "The France of Joan of Arc,"
"Two Worlds," etc

"The Romance of Bayard" is one of perennial interest, as a "life," as a "thing of beauty," is a joy for ever. The story of the chevalier, who was "without fear and without reproach" cannot too often be told. The story opens on the "Field of the Cloth of Gold," and its personelle includes Henry of England, Francis of France, the French Queen mother, the Princess Marguerita, who loved Bayard with intense devotion, and Anne Boleyn, a young French maid of honour. It ends with Bayard's death during the fatal expedition into Italy in 1524. The romance places Marguerita and Anne Boleyn at his side at the last. Col Haggard's historical romances are all well known and highly popular at the libraries and with the general public, and this one is not likely to fall short of high appreciation.

A Durbar Bride.

CHARLOTTE CAMERON

Author of "A Passion in Morocco," "A Woman's Winter in South America," etc

This is a wonderfully interesting novel, conducting one through labyrinths of exciting scenes and chapters with not a dull moment in the entire production. It is written in Charlotte Cameron's most brilliant style. In the first chapters the author depicts the misery of a young bride whose husband became hopelessly insane during their honeymoon. The pathetic story graphically narrated of Muriel's unsatisfactory life—neither maid, wife, nor widow, and the injustice of the law which binds a woman until death to a mad man—is admirably portrayed. Mrs Cameron is the only writer who has as yet given us from an eye-witness point of view a romance on the Imperial Durbar at Delhi, where, as the representative of several papers she had the opportunity of attending the entire ceremonials. The life at the Government Camps, the sweet love story of the hero and heroine, the simple marriage ceremony in Skinner's historic church at Delhi will prove a keen enjoyment to the readers. Their Majesties the Queen, and Queen Alexandra have graciously accepted copies of this novel.

The Career of Beauty Darling. DOLF WYLLARDE

Author of "The Riding Master," "The Unofficial Honeymoon"

"The Career of Beauty Darling" is a story of the musical comedy stage, and endeavours to set forth both the vices and virtues of the life without prejudice. If the temptations are manifold, the author finds much good also in those who pursue this particular branch of the profession for she says "there are no kinder hearts in the world, I think, than those that beat under the finery of the chorus-girl, no better humanity than that which may be found behind the paint and powder and the blistered eyes." Miss Wyllarde has made plain statements in this, her latest book, and has not shrunk from the realism of the life, but, as she says, even the general public knows that the dazzle and glitter from the front of the footlights is a very different view to that which may be seen behind the curtain.

The Retrospect.

ADA CAMBRIDGE

Author of "Thirty Years in Australia," "A Little Minx," etc

"There can be little hesitation in asserting that this is one of the most delightful books of the year."—*Aberdeen Free Press*

"Miss Cambridge has such a delightful style, and so much of interest to tell us that the reader closes the book with the sensation of having bidden a dear friend farewell."

—*Bristol Times and Mirror*

'Written throughout with an engaging literary grace'—*Scotsman*

Francesca.

CECIL ADAIR

Author of "The Qualities of Mercy," "Cantaculte Towers," etc

This author possesses all the qualities which make for popularity and can be relied upon to arrest and maintain interest from first to last. The *Guardian* reviewing "Cantaculte Towers" said—"In it we seem to see a successor of Rosa N. Carey," and those who admire the work of Miss Carey cannot do better than take the hint. A strong human interest always appeals to the reader and satisfies perusal.

The Strength of the Hills. HALLIWELL SUTCLIFFE

Author of "A Benedick in Arcady," "Priscilla of the Good Intent," etc

In this novel Mr Halliwell Sutcliffe returns to the Haworth Moorland which was the inspiration of all his earlier work, it deals with the strenuous life of the moors sixty years ago and will rank with his strongest and best works. Those who remember our author's "Man of the Moors," "An Episode in Arcady," "A Bachelor in Arcady," and "A Benedick in Arcady" will not hesitate to follow him anywhere across the moorlands in the direction of Arcadia.

Officer 666. BARTON W. CURRIE and AUGUSTIN

McHUGH

An uproarious piece of American wit fresh from the Gaiety Theatre, New York, which will be produced on the London boards and in France some time this autumn. It is from the pen of Mr Augustin McHugh, who has associated himself with Mr Barton W. Currie in producing it in novel form. Its dramatic success in America has been phenomenal, and whether as a play or a novel, it will doubtless receive a warm welcome in this country.

Devil's Brew.

MICHAEL W. KAYE

Author of "The Cardinal's Past," "A Robin Hood of France," etc.

Jack Armistron, awaking to the fact that life has other meaning than that given it by a fox-hunting squire, becomes acquainted with Henry Hunt, the socialist demagogue but after many vicissitudes, during which he finds he has sacrificed friends and sweetheart to a worthless propaganda, he becomes instrumental in baulking the Cato Street Conspirators of their plot to murder the members of the Cabinet, and eventually regains his old standing—and Pamela. A spirited story.

The Fruits of Indiscretion SIR WILLIAM MAGNAY

Author of "The Long Hand," "Paul Burdon," etc

This is a story of murder and mystery, in which the interest is well sustained and the characters are convincing. It is absorbing without being melodramatic and thrilling without being sensational. There is to be a wedding at a country house on the eve of which the best man is killed in the hunting field. Captain Routham is asked to take his place, but disappears. His body is found on the railway track. Rolt, a famous detective, is put on the scent, and gradually probes the mystery. Routham had had a love affair with the heroine in former years, and had been blackmailing her. There is a rascally lawyer in the case who is killed in a carriage accident, and is so saved criminal consequences. In the end the heroine marries her lover.

The Tragedy of the Nile. DOUGLAS SLADEN

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